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policemen are now always sent to watch over the safety of the neighbourhood. It is no sinecure to have to watch over the safety of the Parisians of the Thirteenth Arrondissement, where prowling thieves and drunken rioters abound ; and in the late hours of the night, in bad as in fine weather, the police agents must wend their solitary way by the subdued light of the gas lamps placed far apart, and as diligently reconnoitre right and left as if they were in an enemy's country.

Now, on the night we speak of, it was snowing heavily, and a sharp wind drove the flakes into the faces of the two policemen who must needs remain on their beat in the Quartier des Gobelins until daybreak. It was three o'clock in the morning, and they had been walking since midnight, slowly,

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THE OLD AGE OF LECOQ THE DETECTIVE.

PART I.

MONSIEUR LECOQ IN RETIREMENT.

I.

Do you know the street called the Rue du Champ de l'Alouette in Paris? Maybe, if you reside in the neighbourhood of the Madeleine, that you have never heard its name, but the people who live round about the Observatory and the Buttes aux Cailles know it well indeed. It is not a street of yesterday, it has a history of its own, and a somewhat gloomy one, too; for it has witnessed many a crime; and at the commencement of the present century any stranger who passed that way, either by day or night, was liable to be attacked.

Since then, however, the street itself has changed, just like its name, which was formerly written Rue du Chant de l'Alouette, or the Street of the Lark's Song. But now-a-days Chant has been altered to Champ—Lark's Song to Lark's Field—and maybe the change is due to the fact that since the siege of Paris the larks no longer sing so near the ramparts of the city.

Once of such bad repute, the Rue du Champ de l'Alouette—which, by the way, connects the Rue de la Glacière with the Rue Corvisart—has now become a fairly respectable thoroughfare, though it makes no claim to elegance. Millionaires by no means patronise it, but laundresses and baby farmers abound. The black and stagnant waters of the Bièvre will be found hard by, and the sad looking Ourcine hospital rises at a stone's throw. Still, as a set off against these gloomy surroundings, there are two wide boulevards near at hand—an old and familiar one called the Boulevard d'Italie, and a new one which has been christened after the great astronomer Arago.

One winter night, not long ago, two “guardians of peace,” as the Paris policemen are now-a-days called, were pacing their beat in this deserted neighbourhood. It is no sinecure to have to watch over the safety of the Parisians of the Thirteenth Arrondissement, where prowling thieves and drunken rioters abound; and in the late hours of the night, in bad as in fine weather, the police agents must wend their solitary way by the subdued light of the gas lamps placed far apart, and as diligently reconnoitre right and left as if they were in an enemy's country.

Now, on the night we speak of, it was snowing heavily, and a sharp wind drove the flakes into the faces of the two policemen who must needs remain on their beat in the Quartier des Gobelins until daybreak. It was three o'clock in the morning, and they had been walking since midnight, slowly,

methodically, silently, and resignedly, like men who conscientiously perform a duty. Their heads were bowed down against the pelting storm, and the hoods of their cloaks were brought close to their faces, blue with cold, but eyes and ears alike were on the alert, and should occasion require it, they were ready to sacrifice themselves and give up their lives in the performance of their duty.

They had just left the Rue du Champ de l'Alouette, and were crossing the Rue Corvisart towards the Rue Pascal, when the gale became so violent, and the snow so blinded them, that they took shelter under the gateway of a tannery. They could avail themselves of this refuge without neglecting their duty, for the open space here, formed by the intersection of various streets, was lighted by several lamps, and no one could cross it without passing under their vigilant eyes.

"What villainous weather!" said the elder of the two, a grumbler of the Army of Public Order; "I have not seen the like since I served with the First Zouaves in the Kabyle mountains in Algeria. And to think that we have to promenade like this for four hours, without even seeing the end of an individual's nose."

"That's certain. Honest people are in bed, and thieves like their ease too well to work when it storms halberds, especially halberds *à la glace*," replied his companion, who being of the modern school, liked to jest while on duty. He was about, no doubt, to continue his joking to warm himself, when his old comrade nudged his elbow.

In the Rue Corvisart near the Boulevard Arago, they could hear the sound of footsteps, which, if deadened by the snow, were still perceptible to trained ears like theirs. By an old habit, acquired in their profession, they threw themselves up close to the wall, and waited motionless and silent, for the approach of the individual who was still abroad despite the gale and the lateness of the hour. A moment later they saw a man walking towards the Boulevard d'Italie, with his head down, the collar of his coat turned up to his ears, and his hands in his pockets. He wore a large overcoat and a tall hat, and went at a steady pace, neither too slow nor too fast, but just like a man who has been surprised by bad weather, and who goes home without hurrying because he does not like to run.

Nothing, either in his appearance or movements, warranted the interference of the police officers, so they allowed him to pass. "That fellow likes fresh air," said the younger one in a low voice.

"Be quiet, he isn't alone," growled the veteran.

And in fact, just behind them, there resounded another step, heavier and noisier—the step of a man wearing hob-nailed shoes. The individual who had passed first continued peaceably on his way; and the second one soon turned round the corner. He was supporting himself with a stick and stooping beneath the weight of a trunk he carried upon his back.

He looked somewhat like a public porter or commissionaire, but the honest fellows who at day-time stand waiting for jobs at the corners of the streets do not usually work so late, while those belonging to the railway stations do not commence their duties until the arrival of the first trains, that is to say, at four o'clock in the morning.

This porter then was naturally an object of suspicion to the two police agents, and all the more so as since the beginning of the winter the *roulatiers* had been at work. The *roulatiers*, as is well known, are the thieves who make a speciality of stealing from trucks and cabs, carrying baggage. They prowl about the streets, and whenever they see a vehicle momentarily

abandoned by its driver, they seize a package or a box, take it upon their shoulders, and quietly walk away. "That fellow there looks to me as though he had bought that trunk while the owner was absent," said the ex-Zouave. "Let's go and say a couple of words to him; it'll warn us up." And advancing from their post of concealment, the two agents at once stationed themselves in front of the man with the trunk. "Where are you bound like this, my good fellow?" asked the ex-Zouave setting his hand on the man's coat collar.

The porter stopped short, raised his head, looked with an air of astonishment at the police agents, but said not a word. "And what is there in your box?" continued the old trooper. "Your wife's wardrobe or your own? You must have plenty of toggery in that case, for you have at least a hundred and fifty pounds weight on your back."

The porter rested himself on his stick and remained silent, but the person who had preceded him had no doubt heard the police officer's rough voice from a distance, and becoming frightened, had fled off at full speed.

The policemen had no thought of following him, for they were too much occupied with the porter and his burden, which seemed to them a remarkably good prize. "It looks as though you wanted to play sharp," said the younger agent. "However it's all right; you will explain yourself at the station-house; the sergeant will know how to make you talk."

The porter did not stir. It seemed indeed as though he did not understand what was being said to him. However, he made no attempt at resistance but quietly accompanied the agents, who took him each by an arm, and led him off, just as the hurried footsteps of the man who had first passed were followed by the sound of wheels rapidly rolling away.

The station-house stood in the Avenue des Gobelins, close to the National Tapestry works, and the agents were some time in getting their prisoner there, as he walked slowly on account of the weight he carried.

They pushed him into the room where five or six of their comrades were sleeping on camp-bedsteads or warming themselves round a stove, and then helped him to place the trunk upon the floor, an operation he gladly assisted in, but always without saying a word.

"What are you bringing me there?" asked the sergeant, who was writing a report on the corner of a table.

"It is a joker we've caught walking off with this trunk, which he must have stolen at the Orleans railway station or elsewhere," replied the elder of the two policemen. "We questioned him, but he pretends that he doesn't understand, and makes no reply."

"Oh! we'll loosen his tongue for him," said the sergeant, rising.

The singular porter whom he prepared to question was a tall robust young fellow, who did not appear to be more than twenty years of age, and was fairly good-looking. He was dressed more like a countryman than a Parisian. "Now, then," said the sergeant, roughly, "we don't want any farces here. Explain yourself at once, or I shall lock you up until sending you to head-quarters."

The man's only reply was to hold down his head, and put his hands to his ears.

"You want to make me believe that you are deaf? Keep those games for the Council of Revision, and go and lie down in the cell, since you like that better than talking."

The obstinate fellow did not even frown at this sentence, but allowed himself to be shut up in the narrow dark cell, reserved for the tem-

porary confinement of arrested people, without exhibiting the least emotion.

"Now, then, you others," continued the sergeant, "open that trunk so that I may see what that fellow has stolen before I make my report."

The trunk was locked, but with the aid of a chisel and a hammer the old police-officer soon forced it open. But when he raised the lid he gave vent to a cry of horror, for at the bottom of the trunk there lay a woman's corpse.

II.

THE sergeant himself grew pale, and retreated, although he was used to affecting sights, and had, more than once, been present at startling discoveries. All the men in the station-house came and grouped themselves around the open trunk, in a state of great excitement, while the agent who had arrested the porter and forced the lock of the trunk, rose to his feet, exclaiming:

"Ah, the villain! I took him for a thief, but he's a murderer."

No one dared to touch the corpse. It was that of an extremely beautiful woman, dressed in a white silk dressing-gown, trimmed with rich lace. The pallor of death was on her features, but they retained a life-like expression, and her big eyes seemed to look at all these old police agents, who with difficulty restrained their tears. Her hands, crossed upon her bosom, still held a rose camelia, and one would have thought that her lips, partly open, were about to smile.

"One would swear she was asleep," whispered the least affected of the agents.

"Asleep for ever," replied a comrade.

"Ah, they have not failed; they've left the dagger in the wound."

The sergeant hastily leant forward, and amid the lace trimming he perceived the ivory handle of a stiletto. The victim had been wounded in the heart; struck by a steady hand, and evidently with great violence. The knife had entered to the hilt, and as it had not been withdrawn, the woman's blood had scarcely flowed. There was hardly a ruddy spot on the garment, the folds of which had not been disturbed.

"I am no longer astonished that the rascal wouldn't reply," exclaimed the ex-Zouave. "He had his reasons for keeping silent. But he will have to speak presently when we bring him before the corpse. The sooner the better, and I'll go and bring him out of the cell."

"Don't do that," said the sergeant. "The affair is too serious, and I can't take any responsibility upon myself, not even to confront the assassin with the corpse. That is the business of my superiors, and I have no wish to get myself into a scrape by meddling with their affairs. Do me the favour to close that trunk and push it under the camp-bed. A man to the prefecture at a gallop. Another to the district commissariat. Let it be known that we hold the man who struck the blow, that the trunk is just as we found it when we opened it, and that I shall do nothing until the arrival of the chief of the detective service."

The sergeant's commendable orders were executed with that obedience and promptitude, traditional among a corps which is composed exclusively of old soldiers. The trunk was pushed against the wall, and no one was tempted to fall asleep on the camp-bedstead again.

By chance, the cell that night enclosed no thieves, vagabonds, or drunk-

ards. It had been snowing so hard that the game usually caught by the police had not ventured abroad. The icy cold had purged the streets of jail-birds. There was but one prisoner at the station-house, this wretch who had been caught carrying a corpse, and the sergeant, foreseeing that his superiors would perhaps proceed at once with a first examination, recommended the reserve men to despatch any prisoners who might turn up between now and morning to some other station-house. Then, as the messengers sent to the central authorities would be some time gone, as the police-stations at the time we write of were not connected with the prefecture by an electric wire, the sergeant employed his leisure in committing the particulars of the extraordinary capture to paper, not forgetting to call attention to the sagacity displayed by his two subordinates in laying hands on the assassin without any other cause for suspicion than the carrying of an ordinary trunk at an unseasonable hour.

These excellent officers seemed to be less proud of their success than appalled by the horrible sight they had just seen, and indeed all gaiety had completely fled from the station-house. No one spoke a word, nor dared to light a pipe so near to the murdered woman's corpse.

"Just take a look and see what the man is up to," said the sergeant, after an hour's silence. "He looks like one of these sulky rascals, who, to cheat the Assize Court would rather knock their brains out against the wall. The devil! how I should be reprimanded in that case. Tell me how he looks. If he seems to be plotting any trick, I'll send some one to watch him."

The cell was separated from the police office by a wide passage, and the prisoners confined in it were unable to hear what was said in the room hard by. Three minutes later, the officer who had been sent to examine the porter returned gesticulating, his face red with anger. "Do you know how the brigand passes his time?" he asked. "No, you would never suspect it. He's lying on the ground and sleeps like a log."

"Or he makes believe."

"No, not at all. He really sleeps, the heartless wretch! and he snores loud enough to make the glass in the skylight quiver. I shook him; and he opened one eye, grunted, and then went to sleep again."

"What! as cold as it is! without fire! on the bare stone! He must be terribly tired then."

"And he can have no more remorse than a cat who has swallowed a mouse."

"No matter, you must go every few minutes and see if he is awake."

The policemen scrupulously conformed to their superior's order. They had, in fact, conceived a legitimate horror for the assassin; and considering him to be a prize which did them honour, they would readily have volunteered to take turns in watching him during a whole month, rather than have let him escape by flight or suicide.

However, the prisoner continued to sleep, as a man sleeps at twenty years of age, when he has a clear conscience. He slept sounder than ever when the chief of the detective police arrived, accompanied by an inspector and a doctor. The commissary of the district, summoned to the other end of the Arrondissement to examine into a more ordinary crime, had not been found at his office by the messenger sent to notify him of this capture.

The chief of the detective police who has the criminal investigation department under his control, commenced by questioning the sergeant. He listened attentively to the narrative of facts, and to the summary descrip-

tion of the contents of the trunk. "Has the man seen the corpse?" he then asked.

"No," replied the sergeant; "I thought that step might interfere with your plans for the examination."

"I approve of your conduct. You have acted with prudence, and prudence in such a case is intelligence. It would have been more regular only to have opened the trunk in the presence of a magistrate; but, in deciding not to await the arrival of the commissary, you have gained valuable time for us, so that I have only compliments to address to you. Now let me see this trunk."

While two men dragged it from the corner where it had been placed, the chief detective continued: "You are sure that the prisoner can't hear us from the cell?"

"Quite sure."

"That's good, for I do not at all believe in his deafness. Ah! here's the trunk. My dear doctor, it will be your turn presently, but the examination of the receptacle is my affair, and I must see to that first." And, kneeling to examine the trunk more closely, he added: "This is not a box expressly made to serve as a coffin. It is a handsome trunk, of fine leather, adorned with brass. It must have cost a good deal, so that the victim was not poor; far from it. Yes, it is a handsome trunk, made to contain elegant toilets. Woman now wear their dresses so long that they could lie down in the boxes they carry them about in. No initials on the lid. Ah! there was a brass plate which has been removed, no doubt because it bore the name and address of the owner. As to the manufacture, it is English—or American. In France we don't do that kind of work; however, I must verify the point later on. For the moment, I have seen all I wish to. Now, doctor, it is your turn."

The doctor opened the trunk, and was unable to restrain an exclamation of surprise, which was not repeated by the chief criminal investigator, although he was greatly astonished himself. He contented himself with remarking: "If you will be advised by me, confine yourself to stating the cause of death and the position of the corpse. You can complete your work at the Morgue, where I will send the trunk in the condition it now is."

"That is certainly the best thing to be done; and I have but few observations to make here," replied the doctor, while carefully turning aside the lace which hid the wound. "The victim was taken unawares—probably she was asleep, as her features remained calm. The assassin must have chosen the spot for his stroke at leisure. See! the blade penetrated between the fifth and sixth ribs, and up to the hilt, too—Ah! here is something very strange; the poniard has pierced a playing-card, and fixed it to the dead woman's bosom."

"A playing-card?"

"Yes, indeed. The queen of spades!"

III.

At this strange declaration there was a commotion among everybody present. The police officers who had stood back, deferentially, now drew nearer so as to gaze with their own eyes on the incredible discovery which the doctor had just made. The curiosity of these worthy fellows can be easily understood, for it is not a common occurrence to find a queen of spades fixed to the

bosom of a murdered woman. Assassins are not in the habit of thus signing their bloody work, of printing a sort of trade-mark upon their victims, nor of indulging in horrible foolery which adds to their peril by furnishing clues to justice. Nevertheless, it was so. The insolent murderer had struck his victim through a playing card ; a card with a white back, thick, and with gilded edges, such as are only used in drawing-rooms or clubs, and the policemen present wondered what could be the meaning of this ironical and brutal deed.

"It is so," said the chief detective after a close inspection. "One learns something every day. If I had been told of the fact yesterday evening, I should have believed it the invention of some journalist. However I am obliged to believe the evidence of my eyesight, but I declare the case is a novelty. What do you think of it, doctor?"

"From a medical point of view, I think that it is another proof that the woman was killed while asleep. She must have been asleep to have allowed the assassin to place the card on her bosom."

"Unless he had, in the first place, pierced the card with his dagger, so that it might serve as a shield to keep off spurts of blood."

"Indeed !—that, also, is admissible."

"We will examine the probabilities by-and-by," said the investigator, rising quickly. "At the beginning of an affair details should never be approached. This business will make a stir, I can tell you, and I am anxious to conduct it methodically. I foresee enormous difficulties, but I have some splendid clues. That card, for instance—"

"It was, perhaps, placed there to lead you on a false track," said the doctor, who wished in his turn to appear sceptical.

"Perhaps so, but as I mean to operate on a sure basis, I shall commence by questioning the porter, whom I suspect is but an unimportant accomplice. Put the trunk back where it was, and go and fetch me the man. Doctor, we will continue the examination of the body at three o'clock this afternoon, in the dissecting room at the Morgue."

"I am very much afraid that the examination will enlighten you but little. Your sagacity will be of more benefit to justice than my science."

The trunk swiftly disappeared under the camp-bed, and the chief of the detective service seated himself before the table where the sergeant had written his report. A short time elapsed before the prisoner was brought in. He had only been awakened with trouble, and he entered, rubbing his eyes and stumbling like a man who is yet half asleep. The chief turned his sharp eyes upon him, eyes which knew how to fathom the innermost thoughts of the shrewdest criminals. But the prisoner sustained this look, sharp as steel as it was, without the least sign of emotion. His round face retained its calm expression, but he showed signs of weariness when he perceived that he was again about to be questioned. Meanwhile, the chief studied his build and attitudes, the folds and cut of his garments, the form of his hands and the colour of his skin, all those thousand little matters which escape a superficial observer, but which are full of revelations for an experienced detective. After a moment's silent examination, the chief had formed his opinion. "This fellow is not the principal in this crime," he thought to himself. "The man who is afflicted with the hands of a labourer, the feet of a country postman, and the shoulders of a porter, has no reason for killing a woman of the fashionable world and pinning a queen of spades on her breast. However this man is paid by the assassin ; he knows him, and he will deliver him to me, willingly or not. As for the

difficulty of making him talk, that is all foolishness. It is only a question of attacking him in the right way." Then, pretending to make some notes in his memorandum-book, he remained for a few moments with his eyes cast down.

"You knew what there was in the trunk, did you not, my good fellow?" he suddenly asked, in a gentle voice.

He so fully expected that the prisoner, taken unawares, would reply, that he felt greatly disappointed when he saw that he did not at all appear to have heard the question addressed to him. Nevertheless, he was not discouraged. "Very well," he continued. "Your plan is silence. It is a good one, my friend, but we understand it, and I warrant you will give it up at last. You won't persist in it after you have remained in solitary confinement for three months. Besides, it is your interest to tell the truth, for I am convinced that you are not guilty. You see that I play with you, with my cards on the table. You have only been an accessory in this affair, and if you will tell us what man gave you this trunk to carry, your innocence will soon be established. Perhaps, I could even take upon myself to set you immediately at liberty."

The prisoner remained unmoved by these encouraging words, though he indulged in an expressive pantomime, which consisted in carrying his hand to his mouth and his ear.

"You wish to say that you are deaf and dumb," remarked the chief of the criminal investigation department. "Well, we will see. I have studied all languages, even the language of mutes."

The expert officer was not boasting. In anticipation of such a case as now presented itself, he had learned the method invented by the Abbé de l'Épée, and he knew how to express a certain number of ideas with his fingers. So he commenced a conversation in signs, which he conducted more slowly than a professor of the institute of the Faubourg Saint-Jacques would have done, but which a deaf mute, although but little educated, might easily have understood. The prisoner followed his gestures with marked attention, and an expression of vexation came over his face. One would have thought that he was enraged at not being able to understand; and it was plain to see that he did not.

"Oh! oh!" thought the chief, "he is a worse case than I imagined, but he does not see that he condemns himself. A deaf-mute who has reached manhood without understanding the language of signs is not to be met now-a-days. Decidedly, the rascal is no more deaf than I am. I will try a last experiment, and we will then pass to something else." With this resolve he hastily wrote the following words on a sheet of paper and placed it before the prisoner: "It lies with you to escape the guillotine; but if you persist in your silence you will be condemned and executed. I tell you this, and I know what I say, for I have already sent seventeen individuals to La Roquette who were not more compromised than yourself."

Driven into his last entrenchment, the poor devil cast his eyes upon the writing, looked like a savage from Australia ordered to decipher a charter of the twelfth century, and sadly shaking his head, pushed the paper aside. "Dash it all!" said the chief to himself, "if this booby is not a deaf-mute, he is the greatest comedian of present times. We must now resort to extraordinary means."

He rose, made a sign to the sergeant, and went and conferred with him in the passage for a moment. Then he returned, resumed his seat beside the table, and began rapidly turning over the leaves of the station-house

register. The prisoner, standing between two officers, had neither moved nor lost his air of indifference and weariness.

"Well, well," said the chief all at once, "I see that I was mistaken. I took you for an escaped convict whom we have been seeking for the last month, but I have just assured myself that the description of that man does not agree either with your height or your age. You can go, my good fellow."

The man did not stir.

"Let him go, you others," continued the adroit investigator, "and give him a glass of brandy before you put him outside. He has well earned it, for he must have been badly scared."

The policemen looked at each other, not knowing whether the chief was in earnest or not, but the prisoner remained motionless. Thereupon the chief gave a wink to the sergeant, who standing at the other end of the room, at once fired a revolver in the air.

The prisoner did not even give that involuntary start which even the most experienced soldier cannot repress when surprised by a report near by. Only when the smell of the powder tickled his nostrils, he began to rub his nose and turned to look where the smoke came from. This time the experiment was decisive.

"I begin to believe that he is really deaf," muttered the chief, much disappointed, "and I am very much afraid that he will give us a deal of trouble." Then clapping his hand to his forehead, he added: "I must go and see Father Lecoq this morning. None but he can help us out of this. Sergeant," he continued aloud, "the man to the prison, the trunk to the Morgue. Come, doctor, we have nothing more to do here."

IV.

THE Quai Conti is the gayest of all the quays of Paris; the houses standing between the Mint and the Institute are the gayest of the Quai Conti, and these privileged abodes have certainly no gayer nor happier occupant than M. Lecoq de Gentilly. The bearer of these two and somewhat badly assorted names, is an old gentleman, still very fresh and vigorous for his age, who punctually pays the rent of the apartment he occupies on the third floor, and enjoys the reputation of having a capital banking account. He is the most gentle, most amiable, and most obliging of the denizens of the district in which he has resided for nine years. He is also the most regular in his habits. He breakfasts, goes out, returns, dines and retires to rest invariably at the same hours. As the clock strikes noon, he can be met book hunting on the parapets of the Pont des Arts or the Pont Royal, where vendors of old volumes are stationed. Forty minutes later he is to be seen in the Tuileries garden, throwing bread to the sparrows, who know him, and come and perch familiarly on his shoulder. The rest of the afternoon he fishes with a line under the first arch of the Pont de la Concorde. On Sunday, only, does he modify this programme. His son comes to breakfast with him, and then takes him to spend the day in the country with some friends.

For M. Lecoq de Gentilly has a son, a handsome young man, some twenty-eight years of age, whom he loves very tenderly, although he only sees him once a week.

This son has his diploma as a Doctor of Laws, and it is said that he is thinking of purchasing the practice of the notary whose chief clerk he now

is. The father would not be embarrassed in paying for it, for the savings of twenty years have made him rich. And, then again, he has arranged that his only heir shall contract a very advantageous marriage which is shortly to come off. While enjoying then the consideration, esteem and sympathy of his landlord, neighbours and tradespeople, no one could exactly say what had been M. Lecoq's former profession, or how he had gained his fortune. Still, they had occupied themselves somewhat in inquiries relative to his origin and his past life, when he first came to live on the Quai Conti, arriving as he said from the country. They had also laughed a little over the name with which he had adorned himself, and maintained that M. Lecoq had merely been born at Gentilly, near Paris, and that, like so many others, he had created himself lord of his village, without the least authority from the Keeper of the Seals. However, these artful remarks had gradually ceased, the new-comer having gained all hearts, including that of his concierge, who only called him M. de Gentilly.

It was not that he cared anything about it, or boasted of being noble; on the contrary, he affected the greatest simplicity, tapping the youngsters of the neighbourhood on the cheek and giving them cakes, chatting with the shop-keepers on their door-steps and not disdaining to inform himself as to the state of their business. He was much better informed as to the affairs of his fellow-citizens than they were as to his, but he only used the information he gathered for worthy purposes. It was told in the neighbourhood that more than one embarrassed merchant had been able to escape bankruptcy, thanks to a timely offer from him. And two or three families were mentioned whose private troubles he had divined and found a cure for. He passed for a providence, and the gossips likened him to the man with the little blue cape of fairy legends, while an assistant librarian of the Bibliothèque Mazarin, who had noticed the astonishing precision with which he intervened to save people, compared him to the solitary man, who sees everything, and knows everything—according to what M. d'Arlinecourt wrote in a romance of the time of the Restoration.

The fact is, that the worthy gentleman knew a great many things, for his assumed personality cloaked that of the most celebrated detective of our time. M. Lecoq de Gentilly was indeed no other than the famous M. Lecoq whose exploits, related by an eminent and lamented novelist, have delighted so many readers.* He was not willing to abandon his real name, for he had no reason to blush for it, and he had only lengthened it a little so that it might be forgotten. He had mainly done this in view of pushing his son, whom he wished to take rank among a class of people who do not disdain an appearance of nobility. His fortune, however, was not a fancy like his *de*; he owed it to himself, and had not obtained it by any unlawful means. Having become a detective by taste, he found himself after the brilliant successes which brought him into notice, in a position to make an enormous amount of money. Each time that a great robbery was committed, either in France or abroad, whenever a cashier absconded with a large sum, Lecoq was consulted, begged to undertake the search for the culprits, and overwhelmed with offers of large rewards. In a word, a million of francs never took itself off in Europe without M. Lecoq being requested to run after it, and as he caught it nearly every time, he constantly had the pleasure of pocketing a handsome percentage on the amount recovered—far more indeed than it would have yielded if invested either in manufacture or commerce. His business proved, indeed, a lucrative one,

* The Sensational Novels of Emile Gaboriau. (Vizetelly & Co.)

at a time when financiers are so given to absconding, and had he chosen to remain active he might have amassed an enormous fortune. But once in possession of what he considered to be adequate means, all his efforts were directed to forgetting himself, to assuming a new skin, and substituting for Lecoq the detective a quiet homely citizen who, regulated like a clock, complained of the abuse of power, voted for moderate candidates at election times, and knew no more of contemporary crime than what he read in the *Gazette des Tribunaux*.

It was not exactly from choice that the good man played this quiet rôle, for he had still a passion for discoveries, and his eyes glistened when people unsuspectingly talked to him about some judicial problem which excited Paris. He amused himself sometimes in his study by examining evidence, and rubbed his hands when he thought he had discovered a clue—a joint, as he called it—which the police had not seen, or which they had not known how to take advantage of.

However, M. Lecoq had a son, and that son of his was his joy, hope, and very life. How had he come by this son whom he brought up so carefully? His old comrades of the prefecture de police had never known Madame Lecoq, but the dwellers nigh the Mint firmly believed that their respectable fellow-citizen of the Quai Conti was a widower.

Whoever he was, the young man who was called Louis, and whose visiting cards were inscribed "Louis L. de Gentilly," had become a very handsome, very elegant young man—tall and dark, distinguished in appearance and manners, intelligent, well educated, and amiable, though, perhaps, somewhat inclined to melancholy. Indeed some of his friends called him, "the Melancholy Beau." He had been educated at first in England, next in Germany, and he had studied law in Paris. He spoke three languages, and had three times as much information and wisdom as were necessary to make a perfect notary. Too much wisdom, in fact, for his father, who gave him full liberty, would have liked him to sow his wild oats before entering into the holy and solemn state of matrimony. Kept all the week at his office, Louis devoted his Sundays to his father, and the Sunday morning which witnessed the birth of the famous Affair of the Rue du Champ de l'Alouette found him seated *en tête-à-tête* with M. Lecoq, enjoying a breakfast prepared by a skilful cook. The ex-detective was a gourmet, and choice viands were always served at his table. While sipping his coffee, he perceived that his son looked less gay than usual, and said to him with a smile: "What is the matter with you to-day, my boy? You are as gloomy and thoughtful as though you had a crime on your conscience."

"I don't feel very well," replied the young man promptly. "Yesterday evening I went to make a call in a lonely quarter, and could not find a cab. I was obliged to walk for an hour in the snow, and I took cold."

"Do you think you are going to be ill, my boy?" asked the father, whose solicitude was already awakened. "Do you wish me to have a bed prepared for you here and send for a doctor?"

"No, no," stammered Louis, passing his hand across his forehead, "it will be nothing. I think, in fact, that the air will do me good."

"All right, I understand," said M. Lecoq, with a smile, "you no doubt took your farewell of a bachelor's life last night. When a man is to be married in a month's time it is only quite natural. Oh, I ask for no explanation," he added, seeing that his son was about to justify himself. "It is sufficient that you are able to come with me to Boulogne to dine at Madame Lecomte's, and court Mademoiselle Thérèse."

Louis was about to reply, without doubt, that he had no greater desire, when Gertrude, the old housekeeper, came in and whispered something in her master's ear. "He chooses his time badly," grumbled M. Lecoq, "nevertheless, I can't help receiving him." And then turning to his son he added: "Wait for me here, my dear Louis; I shall not be gone more than a quarter of an hour. There are some good cigars in the third drawer of that cabinet; light one of them, it will make you forget your walk in the snow."

V.

THAT M. Lecoq was not a retired grocer was evident enough by the arrangements he had made respecting the admission of visitors. Outside his door there was a common bell rope, ornamented with the classic stag's foot, for unknown visitors—a bell which rang loud enough to be heard throughout the apartment; while for intimate friends there was an electric alarm, hid in a corner, and communicating with the room where faithful Gertrude, whose duty it was to receive visitors and ask their business, kept watch. Thus on rising from table, and leaving his son to his reflections and his cigar, he knew perfectly well whom he was about to give audience to, and he was not at all surprised to find the chief of the criminal investigation department awaiting him in his study. However, it was more than a year since he had seen this functionary, for the latter being well aware that Lecoq had retired from business, only came to consult him in very exceptional cases. When these cases presented themselves, the ex-detective did not have to be pressed for advice, he gave that freely and willingly, but he invariably refused to take an active part in the investigation, and accordingly this was not insisted upon. Thus he was quite easy in mind as to the result of the interview he was about to have with the functionary of the prefecture, and he gave him a hearty reception. "Well," he said, rubbing his hands, "so there is something new at the Establishment?"

"New and interesting," said the chief. "During the fifteen years I have been in office, I have never seen anything so extraordinary."

"And we come to consult Father Lecoq? We don't think, then, that he has lost his tact?"

"I think that you alone are competent to unravel this affair."

"My faith! perhaps you are right! The little man still lives, and he flatters himself that he has lost none of his cunning. And, then, I am lucid to-day, as the somnambulists say; I am lucid, because I am in a good humour. Sit down, my dear friend, and tell me your little story."

The functionary at once commenced a very clear, although detailed narrative of the incidents which had occurred during the previous night. He omitted nothing, and confounded nothing; but knew how to leave insignificant circumstances in the shade, and bring important facts into full light. A man must be a professional to talk in this style. M. Lecoq listened to him with unflagging attention, closing his eyes so that his ears might be the less distracted, and carefully abstaining from interrupting. The one was a good narrator; and the other an excellent listener.

"Is that all?" asked Lecoq, when the story was finished.

"Absolutely all. The man is in prison; the woman at the Morgue. The man has not yet said a word, and the autopsy of the woman has revealed nothing new, except that she was killed less than two hours after eating."

"It is, indeed, a very curious case, a real logogriph."

"Which you will manage to solve, I'm sure."

"I don't know; but at all events I have not found a solution yet. I have several ideas—bases of induction—starting points—stepping stones—but nothing more."

"There is that queen of spades."

"That is something or nothing. Perhaps the assassin merely wishes to mislead you. Nevertheless, the queen of spades may serve you later on—when the victim is known."

"Yes, the identification—that is the essential thing—the body will be exhibited this evening."

"I should not commence in that way."

"Truly?" asked the functionary greatly surprised.

"No, I should have it embalmed and not exhibited till later on."

"Well, then, how would you begin the investigation?"

"I ought to tell you, in the first place, that in my opinion the man is really a deaf-mute, and that his part in the affair is merely that of an accessory. I am even inclined to think that he did not know what he was carrying."

"I am somewhat of your opinion, except as to the last point. It seems difficult to me to admit that this fellow was not an accomplice in the murder."

"He might very well be in the employ of the assassin, and still not be his accomplice. Let us recall the circumstances of the arrest. A person passes along the Rue Corvisart at three o'clock in the morning with his hands in his pockets, it being so cold, and the snow falling so fast that a Christian would not put a dog outside. At fifteen paces behind him comes the man carrying the trunk. He is collared. However, the first individual continues on his way, gets into a vehicle which awaited him on the Boulevard d'Italie, and this vehicle then drives off at full speed. You have told me that the officers heard the sound of wheels in that direction. So it is that first individual whom they should have arrested."

"I am afraid that is the case. But, it can't be helped—those policemen could not think of everything."

"Oh, they have nothing to reproach themselves with. Only sorcerers could have divined that the porter was carrying a corpse on his back. It is to their credit that they entertained the idea of conducting him to the station-house. However, I arrive at my conclusions. The assassin evidently proposed to do away with the corpse. By what method? I don't know, but it looks as though he contemplated putting it in a vehicle, in the one which awaited him at the end of the Rue Corvisart, and sending it out of Paris. At the *barrières* the custom officers only examine the vehicles which enter the city and—"

"Excuse me; two objections. Why didn't the vehicle wait at the door of the house where the crime was committed? The woman was evidently killed in a house—a murderer doesn't pack a corpse in a public road—and then, what means that queen of spades?"

"If it was not to put you on the wrong scent, in case of the porter being arrested, it was, perhaps, a pre-arranged sign with an accomplice, who was to receive the trunk—somewhere—in the country, in a *château* perhaps. Of course these are mere conjectures, which may be shown to be false on investigation. However as to your first objection, it is childish. The organiser of the affair, who must be an expert, was careful not to bring his

vehicle in front of the house where he had operated. He evidently did not wish to attract the attention of the neighbours."

"You think that he preferred to walk through one or more districts of Paris, followed by a man carrying a corpse on his back?"

"Don't forget that this porter is dumb, and that, in case of accident, the assassin was sure to escape. That is just what happened. However let me state the circumstances as I understand them. I don't think this murderer is a professional one, for, according to all probability, he is rich. Well, he wishes to kill a woman from motives which I am ignorant of—but we have not yet to do with motives. Now he has a mute in his service, and a mute is very useful, especially as he can neither read nor write, nor even talk with signs. He takes him with him on going to the woman's, at an hour when he knows he will find her alone, and he leaves him at the door. He, himself, enters the house. He accomplishes his purpose and puts the body in a trunk, which he finds there—you told me it was a woman's trunk. Then taking this burden on his shoulders he goes off without being seen; the house is no doubt without a concierge; it is, perhaps, one of those little houses built expressly for *cocottes*, just starting on their career. However, once outside the murderer finds his dumb servant, passes the trunk over to him, makes a sign to him to follow, and—you know the rest."

"My faith! if that isn't the truth, it is at least probable. Your argument is as well put together as one of M. Sardou's intrigues; but the question is how to begin the investigation. And what thread will lead us to the truth. That is what I don't see, and you alone can show it to me."

"You hold it."

"How so?"

"The thread is the deaf-mute of course."

"But I tell you that he cannot or will not talk? Why you yourself just now expressed the opinion that we should make nothing out of him?"

"Excuse me! I think that he will tell you nothing; but I also think that, without wishing to do so, he will teach you a great deal."

"Explain yourself, I beg of you."

"I will explain it. This mute has not fallen from the moon into the streets of Paris, of course. He lived somewhere before he was arrested. At the assassin's, or somewhere else, it matters little where. When you know where he lived, you will know who he is and whom he frequents. So in the first place, it is necessary to identify the mute."

"Good! but that is not easily done. We cannot expose him at the Morgue, for there is as much life in him as there is in you or me."

"And very fortunately, too. If he were dead, I should advise you to give up investigating the affair."

"You have then found a clue?"

"Yes, and a good one. In fact, I believe it is infallible."

"My dear Lecoq, you are our salvation, and the prefect charged me to say to you that if you would help us—"

"With my advice, as much as you please," interrupted the good man to cut the functionary's insinuations short. "Two questions, before I tell you my plan. You told me that the mute was not present when the trunk was opened; are you sure that he does not know what it contains?"

"At all events, he has learnt nothing since his arrest."

"Very well. Now, then, what was found on him when he was searched at the prison?"

"Seven sous, a clasp-knife, such as are sold at country fairs, and a large piece of charcoal."

"Charcoal!" repeated M. Lecoq. "That may serve us later. In the meantime, here is my plan: without losing an hour, you must set that fellow at liberty."

VI.

"SET him at liberty!" exclaimed the chief of the criminal investigation department. "Let him go!"

"Why, yes," said the ex-detective quietly smiling and twirling his thumbs.

"Come, now, Father Lecoq, you don't mean it—or you wish to puzzle me. What! you advise me to release an individual who would get at least ten years' hard labour, even supposing that he was not condemned as the principal?"

"I advise you to set him at liberty, but I also advise you to have him followed and watched."

"That's something like. I begin to see through it. You think, then, that by following him, we shall find out who he is?"

"I don't think so, I'm sure of it."

"The dodge is a good one. I say nothing to the contrary, although it is not new."

"I invented it fifteen years ago. I used it three times, and it always served me."

"You? Yes, but everybody is not so clever as you are."

"What! in following a man without being noticed? Oh! come, now, I prefer to think that you still have some officers who are capable of working neatly."

"No doubt—no doubt; only if I could operate myself, it would be better. But that is out of the question—the mute knows me."

"If that is all that troubles you, in my time I should have had no difficulty in disguising myself so well, that the man I followed might have asked me the way without recognizing me."

"You, my dear Lecoq, you worked as an amateur. As for me, my official position impedes me. That is why we wished to confide the affair to a man like yourself."

"Don't let us speak of that," said the ex-detective. "Let us get back to our plan. As a general rule, there are two difficulties in using it. In the first place, the man may be so impolite as to get away from his followers; but the officers who allowed themselves to be fooled in that way would deserve to be dismissed, and I don't suppose yours would be so foolish. Next, if the man is very cunning, he may suspect that he is followed, and amuse himself by misleading you. I followed one such man, once upon a time, and he gave us plenty of thread to wind up, still I ended by nipping him. If the individual shows a disposition to play sharp, it is only necessary to collar him again and lock him up. The attempt may not succeed, but at least it costs nothing. However, if the information you have furnished me is correct, I will guarantee that you will have nothing of the kind to fear with your present prisoner. He is deaf and dumb, that has been shewn conclusively, he has understood nothing of what has taken place since he was brought to the station-house. He has not seen what is in the trunk, and, for the reason I've seen you, I don't think he knows. Such being the case, he will not be surprised at finding himself free and he will go off without suspicion. Once outside, he must go somewhere, and when he has led

your officers to the door of a house, no matter where, the rest will follow of itself. I would merely advise you to give them some funds, so that they may not be left behind if the fellow takes the railway, as might very well happen, for I suspect that he does not reside in Paris."

"He can't journey by rail, for he has no money."

"That's true. I forgot that he had but seven sous in his pocket. But he may pass through the barrières and get into the country on foot. Your men must be prepared not to lose him."

"That's easy. Only—"

"I have said my say," continued the old man, gaily. "My consultation is finished, and I think I have given you good measure. Now that I have put the bread and the knife in your hands, it is for you to help yourself. You must therefore allow me to rejoin my son, who is waiting for me in the next room. I only see him on Sunday, and on that day I belong to him."

The police functionary had risen, but did not seem ready to start. "Have you something else to say to me?" asked M. Lecoq, with a touch of impatience.

"Something very important," said the visitor with a mysterious air.

"Let me hear it."

"My dear Lecoq, your advice is worth its weight in gold. I thank you cordially for not sparing it, and I promise you that it shall be followed. You are always the master of us all, and there is none but you to unravel a judicial skein."

"Dear friend, you flatter me too much. I must be on my guard."

"It is useless, for I am about to reach the point. You know that in police matters there is nothing like practice. Now, I have come to ask you, on the part of the prefect and on behalf of the examining magistrate, to consent to conduct this affair yourself. If you will only do so, you shall have whatever you ask for."

"Ah! ah! that is what you were driving at. Very well, my dear fellow. I am very much honoured by the confidence these gentlemen have in me, but I cannot do what they wish, and you will understand why. You know that I have a son?"

"Yes, of course, and I also know that you have a right to be proud of him."

"I accept the compliment, because he deserves it. He is the most dutiful and the best-hearted boy I know. I have brought him up to the best of my ability. He has already made a position for himself, and is on the eve of securing a much better one, for he is about to marry a charming young girl whom he worships, who adores him in return, and who will bring him a large fortune as dowry. He is to be married next month. So judge if I could plunge into an affair that would take up all my time. Besides, my dear fellow, Louis is quite ignorant that I was a detective for a long time, and that a large part of my wealth was gained by hunting rascals. I wish him always to remain in ignorance of it. If he heard of it, I am sure he would not be ashamed of me, for he loves me and knows my worth, but I am anxious to spare him a sorrow. You will not be angry with me for this confession, for you know that there are prejudices against our profession in society. Now, how can I undertake an affair of this kind just at the time when I have to think of establishing my son for life? I should not follow it more than a week before he would notice a change in my mode of life. So let us talk of it no more. You have all you need to do the work as well and better than I."

"No, my dear Lecoq. This affair is not like others. It will be a Chinese puzzle which our officers will lose their wits over. The newspapers will meddle with it, and put sticks between the spokes of our wheels under the pretence of helping us. It will be necessary to have the investigation conducted privately, to publish reports that we have given up all hope of finding the guilty party, and then trust the matter to a man of superior ability, who apparently has no connection with the police, and whom no one suspects. Now, in my own opinion and that of my superiors, there is but one such man, yourself."

"You overwhelm me, but you are mistaken. There is some one whom you could employ, and who answers all necessary requirements. He is an old detective who arrived from London a year ago, and who has already, if I am not mistaken, rendered you some important services. You know whom I refer to. He has two names which look as though he had taken them out of Bouillet's dictionary—two *noms de bataille*—"

"Tolbiac de Tinchebray! The prefect thought of him in the first place, but—"

"It seems to me that it would be an excellent choice. From what I have been told, he is very intelligent, very keen, and very active. He has an independent fortune, and that point is not to be disdained in a profession which requires scrupulous probity. Another still more precious advantage in this case is, that his connection with the prefecture is only known by the principal officers. He is received in society, and has met with success there. You could not find a better man for such an investigation. And by the way, wasn't it he who, during last summer, ferreted out the assassin of the Rue du Sabot for you, the ex-convict who lived among the *demi-monde*, and played at baccarat?"

"Yes, he manœuvred very dexterously in that affair, and his connection with the *demi-monde* helped him very much in finding the man after we had been seeking him for six months. On the other hand, in that case of the theft of the diamonds belonging to the Spanish duchess he completely failed."

"A man doesn't always succeed; but I'm convinced he will do better this time. Have you any objection against this choice?"

"Not precisely. And yet Tinchebray doesn't inspire perfect confidence with us. It has never been exactly known why he left England, and we have not enough information about his antecedents."

"It is clear that his nobility does not date back to the Crusades, but if only sons of peers were employed in the police, it would be like cooking in pearl-grey kid gloves. Believe me, my dear fellow, Tolbiac is the man you need."

"We shall have to take him, since you abandon us, my dear Lecoq. I will speak of him to the prefect, and, to influence his decision, I will back myself with your opinion. But I shall commence by following your advice in opening the door to the mute."

"The sooner the better."

"I go from here to the prison. In a quarter of an hour the mute will be outside. I have precisely two of our best officers at hand; and I will come and tell you the result."

"Whenever you like, except on a Sunday," said M. Lecoq, smiling. "Louis must be getting impatient. We start in an hour's time to spend the rest of the day with his betrothed."

The functionary understood that the interview was ended. So, after

shaking hands, he hastened to the Palais de Justice, to try the plan which had been recommended to him by the most ingenious detective of the past, present, or future.

VII.

ON leaving M. Lecoq, the chief of the detective force had only to cross two quays and part of the Pont-Neuf, to reach the prison, known as the *dépôt* of the prefecture of Police. He walked rapidly, for he longed to try the plan which had been so warmly recommended to him. He hoped a great deal from it, and had only objected for the sake of form; for the prefect had given him *carte-blanche*, understanding that, in so strange an affair, it might be useful to depart from customary rules. The prefecture and the public prosecution office had resolved to carry on the investigation with the greatest celerity and as little noise as possible. They agreed with the chief in the happy idea of not hurrying to confront the prisoner with the corpse; and the mute having been taken from the station-house to the prison, questioned by two magistrates without success, and refreshed with an abundant meal, was allowed to sleep for hours the seeming sleep of innocence.

Thus the chances were that he would fall into the trap about to be laid for him, for he did not appear to imagine that he was accused of a crime. His arrival at the prison, although he was duly registered, had caused him no apparent emotion. The officers and turnkeys in uniform, the huge bolts with which the doors are supplied, the gratings which embellish the windows, nothing appeared to surprise and still less to frighten him. He did not seem to realise that he was being imprisoned, unless indeed it was that he had been in prison all his life and found himself at home there. However, his installation in a rather large, well-lighted cell evidently pleased him, and he began examining the regulation furniture with curiosity. It might have been thought that he had never seen such luxury, and the bed especially seemed to inspire him with admiration. To induce him to lie down upon it, it had been necessary for the principal keeper to invite him to do so by engaging and reiterated gestures. However, once extended on his back, he commenced to snore like an organ.

The prison employes, who knew the principal facts of the case, could not recover from their astonishment at so much indifference, and unanimously declared that this big fellow, with his air of simplicity, was really more insensible than the most hardened villains. The governor, more charitable, was inclined to think that his prisoner was either a lunatic or an idiot; an opinion which was not, however, shared by the chief of the criminal investigation department, and which was, besides, contradicted by the expression of the mute's eyes, when he did not keep them cast down. These eyes of his, when he happened to raise them on those who questioned him, expressed mingled gentleness, sadness, and intelligence.

Thus the problem to be solved remained still intact, and the moment had arrived to employ the stratagem recommended by M. Lecoq. The chief chose two of his best numbers, 29 and 33, explained to them in a few words what they would have to do, and sent them to disguise themselves—*camoufler* is the technical word. No. 33 was an old soldier of the artillery train, named Pigache, who had been in the detective corps for ten years, and was employed mostly in dangerous expeditions. He was chosen to arrest criminals reported to be capable of defending themselves with the

knife ; and, indeed, his height, broad shoulders, strength and courage, proof against anything, fully pointed him out for service whenever resistance and blows were feared. But although broken to the business, and knowing very well how to follow a man, Pigache was not as ingenious as his comrade, Piédouche, No. 29, as he was officially termed. Piédouche also had served in the army, but in the marine corps, and he bore no resemblance whatever to Pigache.

Short, thin and lank, not calculated to hold his own in a struggle, he made up in a great measure for the vigour he lacked by his remarkable tact. He had been seen once, while two officers were struggling unsuccessfully with four prowlers of the barrières, steal in like a cat between the combatants, and trip the four bandits up in turn. As delicate as a silk thread, as cunning as a fox, and, in addition, loving his profession, he not only possessed all the stratagems used by his fellows, but he invented many of his own. It was he who discovered the lost pocket-book trick, an excellent means for discovering the name of a gentleman who has just entered his residence. As he was also master in the art of *camouflage* or disguise, his face being without age and readily changed to any style of physiognomy, the chief invariably confided delicate cases to him—such as watching suspected cashiers, tracking sons of the aristocracy in rupture with paternal authority, and verifying cases of blackmail. Piédouche was a man who, in a case of necessity, could dress like a real swell, and figure honourably at a baccarat table for the purpose of detecting blacklegs. He had several times helped M. Lecoq in different affairs, and professed the greatest admiration for the renowned detective.

On being selected to help in unravelling the *Affair of the Queen of Spades*—as this lugubrious mystery was familiarly styled at the prefecture—both Pigache and Piédouche felt considerably flattered. They could be relied upon to show not merely zeal but even passion in searching for the assassin. In the wink of an eye they were disguised, Pigache as a market-porter, and Piédouche as a Parisian loafer, seller of half-price tickets outside a theatre or picker-up of cigar ends. They then at once went and posted themselves at the two outlets of the yard of the Sainte-Chapelle, No. 33, at the gate leading to the Boulevard du Palais, and No. 29, at the end of the passage conducting to the Quai des Orfèvres. It must be well understood that they had agreed to unite again as soon as the game was started. They were barely in position when the chief entered the cell where the mute was still sleeping like a top. In order to wake this strange criminal, who, since his arrest, had devoted nearly all his time to sleep, it proved necessary to shake him.

“You have been imprisoned by mistake, my good fellow,” said the chief, enacting this bit of comedy as a matter of form, for he was convinced that the prisoner did not hear a word. “You can go now.”

The man rubbed his eyes, got up, as the warders took him by the collar, and looked around him with the air of a fool. They led him to the clerk's office, scrupulously returned him his seven sous, his clasp knife, and his piece of charcoal, and then opening the great door, they pushed him outside.

While the formalities which constituted the feigned discharge from prison were being carried out, the chief of the detective force made for the first floor and watched the prisoner's exit from behind the blinds of a window. He saw the mute walk slowly away, pause at the entrance of the yard, raise his eyes to the gilded vane of the Sainte-Chapelle, then turn in every

direction, like a man trying to find out where he is, and finally after some little hesitation, start towards the quay.

The chief, who superintended operations, was anxious to make sure that they were properly conducted. He rapidly proceeded by interior passages, to the new part of the Palais de Justice, and gained the quay by a door opening upon the space formerly occupied by the Rue de Jerusalem. Hardly had he stepped outside than he perceived Piédouche leaning over the parapet, and watching two anglers, who persisted in bothering the gudgeon despite the wintry cold. Further on at the corner of the Pont Saint Michel, he also espied Pigache, who advanced with a waddling gait.

Between the pair the mute stood motionless in the middle of the road, apparently seeking his way. No doubt, he failed to find it, for he finally sat down on the curbstone and remained there, with his arms hanging by his sides and his head down, like a man who does not know where to go.

In the meanwhile the chief wound round towards the Pont-Neuf and took up his position at the corner of the quay. The mute did not move.

"Oh ! oh !" muttered the chief, "I begin to think that Father Lecoq is mistaken this time. Our man is more cunning than he. He looks to me as though he were disposed to remain there until he is relieved. It is possible that he suspects that urchin in a blouse is one of our numbers ? No, for he doesn't raise his eyes. Decidedly, he is an idiot, unless, indeed, he's very shrewd."

At last at the end of half an hour the mute rose to his feet and made a start, but it was to re-enter the yard of the Sainte-Chapelle. Pigache followed him from behind, and the chief of the detective force, who was at a loss to understand what it all meant, saw him re-appear ten minutes later and confer with Piédouche, who at once started towards the Pont-Neuf, leisurely shuffling along. He passed in front of the chief, and, without stopping, threw him these words : "The mute has returned to the prison. The head-keeper wants to know what he is to do."

"Go and tell him to wait my orders."

No. 29 went his way, leaving his superior officer very much out of countenance and greatly perplexed. He was asking himself what he should do to parry this unexpected blow, when just then he perceived M. Lecoq leaning on a young man's arm, ten paces off, in the middle of the Pont-Neuf.

VIII.

"DASH it all !" said the chief of the detective force, between his teeth. "Father Lecoq arrives just in time. He loaded my gun, and it has refused to fire because his powder's bad. He must furnish me with better ammunition, or else admit that his invention is devoid of common sense." Then seeing that M. Lecoq was about to pass along without recognising him, he said to himself : "That's no doubt his son, that tall, dark young fellow whose arm he has. The worthy man won't like me to approach him in his son's presence, but, faith ! so much the worse. I want to know how he'll get out of this. And, besides, I'll be very polite."

Thereupon, placing himself right in the old man's way, the chief advanced, hat in hand, and said politely : "Excuse me, my dear M. de Gentilly, I should like to say a word to you in private. I will not detain you long."

"Wait for me one minute, my dear Louis," said M. Lecoq, withdrawing

his arm and approaching one of the semi-circular recesses formed by the advancing buttresses of the bridge. "You might have spared me this interview in the public street," he said to the police functionary in an undertone. "I told you only an hour ago that I was anxious to keep my son in ignorance of anything connected with the establishment."

"Excuse me, my dear Lecoq, the case is so urgent that—"

"If it is so urgent as that, speak, but be brief. We are going to take the boat for Saint-Cloud, and your stopping us here may make us miss it."

"Here is the matter in two words: I have just let the man go, as you advised me. He remained on the quay for twenty minutes, and then returned to the prison by himself."

"Oh! oh!" said the ex-detective, pricking up his ears like an old cavalry horse at sound of the bugle, "that's pretty well played. You have to do with a fellow shrewder than I supposed, unless—" M. Lecoq stopped suddenly, and his face assumed a peculiar expression; it, so to speak, armed for the strife. He reflected, "We are on the wrong track," he said at last. "This mute is shrewd because he acts in good faith. He returned to the prison merely because he does not know Paris, and does not know where to go."

"Then your stratagem is worth nothing, and we are more than ever embarrassed."

"There is, perhaps, a way out of it."

"Tell it me then."

"How did the man get from the station-house at the Gobelins to the Dépôt at the prefecture?"

"In a prison-van, of course."

"Good! then he saw nothing on his way. Have him taken back in the same van to the same station-house. Instruct the sergeant to send him away a quarter of an hour after his arrival, between two officers, to the very spot where he was arrested. They will leave him there and go away without looking behind them. Your two numbers, who are they?"

"Pigache and Piédouche."

"Both excellent. They will go on ahead, and while walking about they must see what the mute does. I have an idea that, with the start we give him, he will remember his way."

"Hum! I think he will suspect."

"If he is guilty, certainly, and in that case you will never find out anything from him. But if, on the contrary, as I think, he has only been an unconscious instrument, I am sure that he will take you somewhere."

"It is very doubtful, and I should prefer—"

"Excuse me," said M. Lecoq, turning aside to rejoin his son, "but if I talk with you a minute longer, I shall miss the boat, and our friends are waiting for us on the quay at Boulogne. Your servant, dear sir." And he walked away with an alert step.

"Old Lecoq's intellect is certainly greatly failing him," remarked the chief of the detective department, abandoned to his own resources. "His plan isn't worth a curse. It's true that we risk nothing to try it, and besides I see no other. If the mute doesn't fall in with it, we have nothing left but the chance of identification at the Morgue on which we can count but little. I'll try Lecoq's device; if it fails I'll send for Tolbiac and give the affair over to him. He's a bit of a caution, but we'll keep our eyes and fingers on him."

Having come to this decision the chief lost no time. Nos. 29 and 33 were

sent to the Rue du Champ de l'Alouette, while the mute, packed into a compartment of the prison-van, vulgarly called "the salad-basket," took the road to the police-station at the Gobelins. The chief himself sent for a cab and drove to the open space formed by the juncture of the Boulevard Arago and the Rue de l'Ourcine, close to the hospital. Wishing to watch what transpired from a distance, he had calculated that he had better remain there inside the vehicle. The man with the trunk had been arrested coming from the Rue de l'Ourcine. If he decided to return to the place whence he had started, he would go that way.

An hour later everybody was in position. The mute had made no trouble about taking his place in the prison-van, which took him back to the station, whence it had brought him in the morning. There, the sergeant, after making a little speech for the benefit of the prisoner, in case he heard it, hastened to deliver him over to two of his subordinates, saying: "Rid me of that vagabond, and take him as far as you can so that he won't come back to bother us."

However, the prisoner did not at all appear to understand these words, which were spoken with the view of inspiring him with confidence, but quietly followed the two policemen who followed the Rue Croulebarbe to the Rue Corvisart and abandoned him at the crossroads, saying: "*Bon voyage!* be careful not to get caught again."

Piédouche, still dressed like a loafer, was sauntering along the Rue des Cordelières, while Pigache smoked his pipe under the gateway of the tannery at the corner of the Rue du Champ de l'Alouette. It was freezing as hard as it could freeze, and the cold had hardened the snow which had fallen during the night. No one passed along, and all the life of this poor neighbourhood seemed centred in the taverns which abound on the outer boulevards. Thus the police agents had a good opportunity for observing the movements of the man they were watching, and they had arranged themselves in such a way that he would not notice them.

The mute, in the first place, looked after the policemen from the station, who had just left him, and then leaning against a garden paling, he began to gaze about him. Pigache and Piédouche at first were afraid that he would take root there, just as he had on the Quai des Orfèvres, for he did not move for some minutes. At last, however, having no doubt ascertained where he was, he approached the house at the corner of the Rue Corvisart and the Rue Pascal, examined the wall, made a gesture of surprise or satisfaction, and then started off towards the Boulevard Arago. Nos. 29 and 33 let him go on and then quietly took the same road.

"Ah! the rascal," said No. 29 to himself as he passed the house at the corner, "he made a mark on the wall; so that was the reason why he had a piece of charcoal in his pocket. Now he will know his way like 'Tom Thumb,' and take us straight to where our business lies. The governor will be happy."

The governor was, in fact, very happy, for through the raised window of his cab he saw the mute advance with the decided step of a man who knows perfectly well what he is about. The detectives followed him without seeking to hide themselves, and stopped at the same time as the mute stopped close to the Hôpital de l'Ourcine and ten paces from the vehicle occupied by the chief of the criminal investigation office. The deaf and dumb man seemed to be rather puzzled. He went from one corner of the square to the other; and it might have been thought that he was afraid to leave it. At last, however, he decided to cross the boulevard and follow the Rue de l'Ourcine,

which begins right opposite the Rue Corvisart and of which it is indeed but a prolongation. He followed it without hesitation to the Boulevard de Port-Royal, where he again came to a halt. The wide streets evidently confused him.

Meanwhile, the chief's cab was following the detectives at a walk.

The mute, after again examining the walls, went on straight ahead, and then turned to the left into a little street known as the Rue des Lyonnais. He followed it as far as the Rue Berthollet, which runs parallel with the gardens of the Val-de-Grâce Hospital, and then took on the right hand the narrow winding road called the Rue de l'Arbalète, which runs into the Rue Mouffetard after crossing diagonally the Rue des Feuillantines. All this ground was quickly covered, and the assurance which the mute displayed showed that he was now walking in a neighbourhood with which he was well acquainted.

The officers did not feel quite at ease, but their delight became complete when they saw him halt before an iron gate, almost at the corner of the Rue Lhomond, examine the house it faced for a moment, and deliberately ring the bell.

According to a manœuvre which had been arranged beforehand, Pigache walked a few more steps, and took his place on the opposite sidewalk, while Piédouche went still further and hid himself at the corner of the Rue Lhomond. Whichever way the mute tried to escape, his retreat was surely cut off.

At the same time the chief of the expedition left his vehicle and walked slowly towards the gate. The mute still rang, but nobody came to let him in. However, the chief espied a female coal vendor who showed her black phiz out of her shop door hard by. "You may ring away, my boy," she called to the mute, "the box is empty."

IX.

"ISN'T that house occupied?" the chief asked this woman.

"The tenant must have moved away last night," said she, "for the servant hasn't shown her nose this morning."

"There is a servant—it is well to know that," thought the chief. "If I ask you this," he continued, "it is because I see that poor fellow tiring himself with ringing. It would be a charity to let him know that there's no one there."

"Bah! he will find it out. And, then, I am not quite sure if the lady has really gone. It was the servant who told my man yesterday that she was going to the English people's country with her lady, and that she expected to start at midnight. However, I was well asleep long before midnight—so that—"

"You don't know the person who is ringing?"

"I've never seen him before," replied the woman, who was surprised by all these questions.

"Perhaps he has mistaken the door. I'll go and ask him."

And, leaving the woman somewhat amazed, the chief of the criminal investigation service went straight towards the mute, who had not yet perceived him, so greatly had he been occupied in ringing the bell. The chief touched the young fellow on the shoulder, whereupon he turned round, and seemed surprised to recognise the man who had so repeatedly tried to question him. Still he did not appear at all frightened.

"That's a more decisive sign than all the others," said the chief to himself. "Lecoq was right. This fellow knows nothing about the murder. But he has brought us to the nest; which is all we need. The thing is now to act with prudence and method."

His plan was already made. So taking the mute by the arm he led him to the vehicle, made him get in, signed to No. 33 to approach, and bade him sit inside and watch the prisoner, whom he did not intend to let go again. Then, going to No. 29, who had slowly approached on seeing the turn things had taken, he told him to stand guard in front of the gate. "I'll enter alone," he concluded. "If the doors are locked, you can go and find a locksmith; but I'll bet that they are open. Remain here, and don't come unless I whistle."

"And you," he added, addressing the coal-woman, "not a word of this to your customers. I am a commissary of police, and I have come to make an official visit at your neighbour's. So be prudent, for I leave an officer to watch you, and I shall return presently to question you." At the same time he unbuttoned his overcoat to show his tri-coloured sash.

At sight of this dreaded insignia, the woman disappeared into her shop. "Keep your eyes well open," said the chief to his subordinate Piédouché, who replied with a significant gesture.

Then returning to the gate, the chief attentively examined the house and its surroundings. It was a mere two-storeyed cottage, with three windows in front, and separated from the street by a good-sized yard. The shutters were not closed, and the only sign that the house was abandoned, was that no smoke arose from the two red brick chimneys above the roof.

The chief soon turned his attention to the snow covering the yard. Fresh snow is a book which the expert detective always turns to at once, for valuable traces are often read in it. Criminals frequently write on it their own condemnation when not careful to obliterate their tracks. Now, from the gate to the cottage, there were several foot-prints which the frost had preserved marvellously well. Four very distinct tracks could be seen; two deeply made by a large foot, and the other two traced by a smaller one, evidently encased in nicely made boots; still these last, like the larger marks, were evidently the foot-prints of a man. It was curious to note that these tracks were disposed two by two, that is to say that the large and small ones were always side by side. The first obliqued to the right, the other to the left, but both ended at the house steps, and, strange to say, they both went from the street to the house. They had entered twice, but had not returned; the tracks all went towards the house.

"This is incomprehensible!" muttered the chief detective, "for the two tracks are made by the same two pairs of feet. A man cannot return when he has not departed; so the house must have another outlet—however, that is to be seen. Anyway the large prints were evidently made by the mute, who has huge feet, and wears hob-nailed shoes—I can in fact see the marks of the nails. The other track is plainly that of the murderer. He wears small, well-shaped boots, with high heels. It will be necessary to have plaster casts taken of these imprints. Let us see, now, if we shall need a locksmith," he added, putting his hand on the brass knob of the lock.

However, the lock worked, and the gate opened. "They were in a hurry, and did not take time to lock it," thought he, "or, rather, they did not have the key. The murderer entered this woman's house as if he had

been at home. No one came to open the gate for him, for the servant's tracks are not to be seen. The mute accompanied him. They must have found the gate unlocked. It remains to be seen whether the door of the house is unlocked as well."

He then crossed the yard, making a circuit so as not to efface the foot-prints, and on arriving at the steps of the house he perceived that one half of the door had only been pulled to against the other, without being fully shut. On entering he found himself in a large vestibule, at the end of which was a staircase conducting to the first floor. This hall was encumbered with trunks and bags. There were some of every form and size, and among others a long trunk exactly similar to the one which the mute had carried when he was arrested by the police.

"If I still had any doubts, this would dispel them," said the chief of the detective force, in a low voice. "We are most certainly on the track, and I think we can get along without M. Tolbiac de Tinchebray. We will open all this baggage presently, and I'll be bound that we'll find all that we want here. Let us now proceed to an inspection of the rooms."

There were two doors on each side of the vestibule. He opened the first one on his right, and found himself in a drawing or sitting-room, somewhat oddly furnished. There were some handsome Louis Seize chairs beside others in spurious mahogany, which were merely worth a franc or two. The curtains were of silk, but worn to the woof. On the mantelshelf there was a fearful-looking clock of gilt-bronze between two costly Japanese vases. A tawdry looking chandelier hung from the ceiling, and four candelabra of very good style were placed opposite each other on panels adorned with beautiful Venetian mirrors. All this seemed to have been bought hastily at second hand. There had been a fire in the grate, and the cinders of some papers which had been burnt there formed a large black pile.

"Those cinders must also be examined," muttered the police functionary, as he raised the curtains which separated the drawing-room from a boudoir without windows, the house only being lighted from the front.

This second room was therefore somewhat dark, and the chief merely noticed in it an old-fashioned hall clock, tall enough for a man to hide in, and a card-table, on which some cards were spread out in several rows. A chair was upset on the carpet, close to the table.

"Ah!" said the investigator, "the lady was playing Patience—she was thinking of her lover when she received the blow—and no doubt it was here that she was struck. I must count these cards to see if the queen of spades is missing." However nothing but the overthrown chair was disarranged in the boudoir. The clock was still going.

The chief then returned to the drawing-room, crossed the vestibule, and opened another door. It was that of the dining-room. The table was laid. Two covers placed opposite each other shewed that two people had been seated there. A *paté de foie gras*, and a box of Fontainebleau grapes indicated that the diners had not calculated expense, for Madame Bontoux, the renowned purveyor of *foies gras*, does not give her merchandise for nothing, and grapes are very dear in the month of January. However, the repast must have been suddenly interrupted, for everything was in disorder on and around the table. A broken chair lay on the floor. Two overthrown decanters had flooded the table-cloth with wine and water, and the carpet was strewn with fragments of bottles and plates.

"Oh! oh!" murmured the officer, "I was mistaken. It was not in the

boudoir that the blow was struck, it was here. And, nevertheless, the condition of the body showed that there had been no struggle between the victim and the assassin, and yet here I find traces of a desperate conflict. It is strange, very strange. And besides here on the floor there are stains which seem to me to be stains of blood. Let us look at the table-cloth; it is only soiled with wine. The woman, then, must have been struck while standing, but how did the wound bleed so much? the dagger is not larger than a shoemaker's awl, and the effusion ought to have been internal. Here is a long trail. This is becoming more and more extraordinary. Where does this trail lead to. Ah! towards a room which corresponds with the boudoir, and which must be the pantry. The woman fled, then, in there—we shall see.”

The chief pushed open the communicating door, which stood ajar. “What! another!” he exclaimed, starting back with surprise.

He had just seen a bloody corpse lying upon its back with its arms extended!

X.

THIS corpse was that of a man fifty years of age, tall, robust, and tastefully attired. A fine gold chain hung from the pocket of his white waistcoat, which was stained with a large spot of blood. His black silk cravat looked as though it had been twisted, and one of the lapels of his coat was torn. His overcoat and hat had been thrown in a corner. His face, without beard or mustaches, but framed with grey side-whiskers, was disfigured by a terrible wound, which had gashed the forehead and destroyed an eye.

“The affair is becoming complicated,” said the chief, between his teeth. “This man was killed by a blow from a loaded cane, after a struggle. The murderer must have taken him first by his cravat and coat collar. The struggle commenced at the table. He fell. His body was dragged here—and here it was left without time being taken to hide it. The assassin calculated on returning for it after he had rid himself of the woman's body. He would, no doubt, have packed it and sent it off on the mute's back.” Then, after reflecting, he continued: “What astonishes me is that he did not operate with this man in the same style. He surprised the woman and killed her with a single blow, whereas he must have fought with the man like a street porter. I know very well it is not so easy to stab a vigorous fellow like this. Who can this person be? He has the appearance of a rich merchant. Looks like a protector; that of this lady, probably. We shall have no trouble in identifying him. He must have a commercial establishment, a family. He must be missed somewhere. Without taking into account that papers and visiting-cards will certainly be found in his pockets. With such style a man always has a pocket-book on his person. One thing is sure, and that is, he was not killed to be robbed, for he still has his watch and chain, and I am very much inclined to think that money had nothing to do with the murder of the woman. So we have to work outside the criminal class. It is of no use searching among the ex-convicts. This is a choice affair, an affair which exactly belongs to M. Lecoq's specialty. What a pity that he won't take it up. He hasn't failed in the least, the old Lascar. He has already given me two good pieces of advice; and without him we should still be hunting at hap-hazard. Now, then, the question is, what are we to do?” And, returning to the dining-room, he mechanically approached the window which looked out into the yard.

Evening was approaching, and the street was silent and deserted. The carriage in which Pigache guarded the deaf-mute was still standing not far from the gate, and Piédouche was walking up and down the sidewalk.

"No one in the neighbourhood suspects anything," said the chief to himself. "There is only the coal-woman who knows anything, but she can be kept in her shop until to-morrow to prevent her from talking. It is a situation which rarely presents itself at the discovery of a crime, and I should greatly like to take advantage of it."

"Yes," he continued, while striding up and down in the dining-room, "the thing can be tried, and, if I decide to set a *mouse-trap*, I must do so at once. No one will be caught here after the magistrates have been, for, of course, the newspapers will make the deuce of a noise. I can see it from here—*The Affair of the Rue de l'Arbalète* the papers will say, and the assassin will read the reports of course; but as long as they have said nothing about it, he may think that we have not found the house. He knows that his mute is arrested, but he is sure he will say nothing as he can neither write nor talk by signs. He must have brought him up expressly to act as a discreet accomplice. I must send that mute to the Institution in the Rue Saint Jacques. When he is taught he will tell us a good many things, but unfortunately it will take time to teach him, and if in the meantime we could catch his master that would simplify matters and no mistake. Well, but why shouldn't he take a stroll round this way to-night, this corpse remover? He was in a hurry to carry the woman away and did not take time to put things in order. The man in the pantry must trouble him, especially if he neglected to remove his papers. Besides, if things are left in their present condition until to-morrow no harm will be done. It is even unnecessary for me to go up-stairs."

"Come," continued the chief criminal investigator. "I will certainly try the *mouse-trap* dodge. It isn't novel to be sure, but it's still good, and, to be sure the business is well done, I will do it myself."

After this resolution, the officer passed into the vestibule, went out of the house, crossed the yard, being careful not to mix his foot-prints with those of the presumed murderers imprinted in the snow, and, reaching the road, went straight to Piédouche, who said to him: "The coal-dealer has just returned. His wife must have told him something, for they have barricaded the door of their shop on the inside, and I believe they have gone to bed without their supper. I looked through the key-hole, and saw that their candle is out."

"Good! that's what we want. Now then we must work quickly and well. You will tell 33 to go to the prison with the cab, have the mute properly entered again, and return with two other numbers, the best he can get."

"I understand; and I?"

"You? Just watch the gate, and when our men arrive place them as you think best: not too near though. They will serve as a reinforcement. It is you who must come when I call."

"Then it's a *mouse-trap*?"

"Yes. You know the game. Let the mouse enter the hole, and wait to of pounce upon it, so as to make sure of catching it."

"Oh, you may rest easy, monsieur. I sha'n't stir unless you whistle. My comrades will guard the two ends of the street. Only, the mice come out late, and we are in for all night, and it's only five o'clock."

"You can send one of the numbers to get some bread and cheese. There is a baker and a grocer in the Rue de Feuillantines."

"And you, patron?"

"I? Oh, I shall dine to-morrow morning. To business, my good fellows. If the game turns up the affair will give you honour. So it's understood: I'm going to attend to my duties, and don't neglect yours. Ah, by the way, the mouse may be a woman."

"A woman!"

"Ycs. There's the servant who has disappeared; she may come back after her mistress's trunks. Still, I don't expect it. I should rather fancy it will be the mute's master who will show his nose here. But let him or another come, you will operate the same."

"It's understood, patron."

Detectives readily take a hint, and the chief did not think it necessary to enter into further details in the instructions he gave to No. 29.

He quickly entered the house, and asked himself where he should hide. It was night, and he needed a light to enable him to see the assassin if he came, but it was essential that this light should not be seen from the outside. The chief went into the boudoir, being careful to leave the door communicating with the drawing-room open, so that he might hear the sound of the assassin's footsteps as soon as he entered the house. He also partly opened the window in the drawing-room so that the sound of his whistle might reach Piédouche's ears. There were two wax candles in silver candlesticks on the card-table, the candles being almost intact. They must have been extinguished immediately after the crime. The officer lit one of them, and put the candlestick in a corner on the floor.

After this he sought for a place whence he could see without being seen, but, at first, he could find none to suit him. Then he thought of the clock. It was large enough to contain him, and, moreover, the case was pierced with a lozenge shaped hole, by which he could breathe, and the key was in the lock. He opened it, took in the dimensions, and found that he could hide inside without any other inconvenience than stopping the pendulum.

He was ready now for the siege so he sat down in an arm-chair, close to the door leading to the vestibule, and waited.

"At the first sound I hear," he said to himself, "I will get into the clock. The man won't imagine that I have stowed myself away in there. If he enters the boudoir, I shall see what he does, and then whistle for No. 29. If he goes into the dining-room first, I will get out softly and go and whistle from the door-step."

Nothing was needed now but patience, and it needed a good deal to spend several hours in that cut-throat place, a few feet from a corpse. And still more, it needed courage to provoke an interview, short as it might be, with an assassin who very probably cared little about committing a murder more or less. However, patience and courage are the two fundamental virtues of the detective profession.

The chief of the criminal investigation service was seated where, no doubt, the victim had often sat, and occupied his enforced leisure in thinking over all the circumstances connected with this strange affair and examining the contradictions it presented. He arrived at no satisfactory conclusion, however, and said to himself more than once that he would have to secure the services of Tolbiac, the somewhat indirect successor of M. Lecoq.

The hours passed by, marked by the clock, which struck with a reverberating noise. The twelve strokes of midnight had just sounded, and the

watcher was about to rise to light the other candle, for the first was on the point of going out, and gave but a flickering light, when suddenly he heard a faint noise. The outer door turned softly on its hinges. The chief rose, and threw himself precipitately into his chosen hiding-place.

Some one was cautiously walking in the passage, and his steps gradually approached the boudoir.

Presently, in a restrained voice, these words were spoken : " Marie, are you there ? "

The chief was careful not to stir, and held his breath for fear of betraying his presence. The silence was profound in this gloomy house, so profound that, from his hiding-place, he could hear the visitor's tread on the carpet of the drawing-room. At this hour, when vehicles have ceased to rattle over the street pavements, the slightest crackling resounds in a scantily furnished house, the lightest breath becomes perceptible ; and the chief, crouching in the clock-case, regretted having involuntarily stopped the pendulum when he entered, as its tic-tac would have covered the faint sound of his restrained respiration.

However, the nocturnal visitor did not suspect that he was watched, for in pronouncing the woman's name, he gave the police, here represented by one of its superior officers, a most valuable clue. The chief thus learnt that the house had been inhabited by a woman named Marie. He redoubled his attention, listened with all his ears, and prepared to look with all his eyes through the aperture in the case, inside which he remained as motionless as a statue.

The visitor was still walking stealthily. He slowly approached the entrance to the boudoir, and seemed about to raise the curtain which masked it. Before deciding to do so, however, he paused, and repeated in English the words which he had already spoken in French : " Are you there, Mary ? "

Naturally, no one answered this call. But the chief did not lose a word of it. " Good," he thought, " the woman is English, or, at least, she understands English. That is a beacon which will, later on, help us on our road. "

There was another pause, and then the curtain began to move. A hand held the folds of the heavy material back, and a head appeared—a head wearing a tall hat, the new silk of which glistened in the light of the expiring candle, which the head detective, taken unawares, had not had time to extinguish or change. This single candle gave but a flickering light, bobbing up and down, now flashing forth and then dying out again, and after a second or two starting up to die, leaving the boudoir in all the greater obscurity, as the sudden flashes of light had been more brilliant. This obscurity greatly inconvenienced the occupant of the clock in observing the unknown visitor, who had not yet decided to raise the curtain altogether. Moreover, the candle stood in a corner on the floor, in such a position that its light fell on the visitor obliquely and from below. This was a most unfavourable circumstance and was by no means calculated to enable an observer to distinguish the features of a man seen for the first time. The chief could scarcely see these features through the little lozenge-shaped aperture, which happened to be just at the height of his eye. He only espied a heavy black beard, for the brim of the hat hid the visitor's forehead, and the greater part of his face remained in shadow.

" Will he enter, or will he go out ? " the chief asked himself. And this question was not the only one which pre-occupied him. This night-prowler was undoubtedly the assassin, and he had no wish to let him go away as he

had come. But he had to decide whether he would have him arrested now by giving the signal, or whether it would not be better to wait a little. To whistle at once was to deprive himself of the useful information he might derive from the murderer's movements, for the latter had certainly not returned to the house where he had committed his crimes, and which still contained the corpse of one of his victims, without a motive. That motive the chief of the detective service divined, or rather thought he divined.

"It is as clear as daylight," he reasoned, with the rapidity of deduction he possessed. "This fellow knows that his mute is arrested, and that the body of the murdered woman is at the Morgue; but he does not know that we have discovered the house where he did his work, and that we await him here. He only feels more or less certain that the whole secret will be found out within a few days. Even if we had not come here, the neighbours would finally have been astonished at the sudden departure of the tenant of the cottage, without taking into account that the smell of the murdered man's body would have diffused itself throughout the neighbourhood. So our man said to himself that he must take advantage of the first night to obliterate the final traces of the murder. He will put everything in order in the dining-room, pack the body neatly in one of the trunks standing in the hall, and carry it off on his back, but unfortunately for him he hasn't the mute to assist him as with the other one. This Mary whom he called just now is the servant, who must have been his accomplice, and who, seeing that he did not return last night, has fled, leaving the door unlocked so that he might enter. The coal-woman almost told me that this servant was English, and this fellow speaks English. That is surely the way of it, and now I know the affair on the tips of my fingers. But we have to do with a very shrewd rascal, and if I have him collared before he has commenced his business, he will not fail to invent a story to explain his presence here. In his place I should have no trouble. He has only to say that he was the lover of the murdered woman; that he came to see her on the sly—a proof that he did not know she was dead—or some other tale of that kind. If, added to that, he is sufficiently clever to hide his identity—which is not difficult for a foreigner; for he must be English—he can drag us along for six months or a year in an endless investigation. No, no, none of that. I must be prepared for every emergency. We must catch this scoundrel at his work—it is the only way to prevent him from denying it. Go ahead, my good man, go and cleanse the dining-room floor, and pack the corpse which you dragged into the pantry. When you are ready to carry away the trunk, we will come and help you. I have my whistle, the drawing-room window is open and Piédouche has a fine ear. You will be waited on at once."

All these conclusions were reached, all this plan constructed, in less time than it takes one to write it down—in less time, indeed, than the man with the silk hat took to examine the boudoir before entering it.

The officer, having decided to wait, kept very still. He had taken his precautions for an emergency. He held his whistle in his hand, and had only to carry it to his lips to summon the faithful, brave and vigilant Piédouche to the spot. So he had nothing to fear, but everything to gain in letting the assassin commence operations.

The rogue was still there. He had neither taken a step in advance nor in retreat, but continued to look around him without raising his head.

He was evidently reflecting as to what he should do, and he also seemed

to feel some reluctance about crossing the threshold of the boudoir. "She is not there," he murmured, in very good French. "Where can she be?"

The chief drank in these words and thought, pleasantly: "You are defeating yourself, you scamp. Seek your English servant—you won't find her—she has given you the shake; she has been shrewder than you, for we sha'n't catch her to-night; but it's true she will lose nothing by waiting." And, struck all at once with a fresh idea, Piédouche's superior said to himself: "Suppose that she was upstairs! I was wrong not to visit the rooms of the first floor; it was the discovery of the second corpse that upset me."

"That candlestick on the floor—that's strange," said the stranger, continuing his monologue. "Did she put it there?"

At this moment the expiring candle threw out a last glimmer which, unfortunately, reflected on the whistle which the police functionary hid in the clock, held near his mouth; that is to say, exactly behind the hole cut in the case. Then the light went out, with that offensive smelling smoke common to candles of modern manufacture in their last gasps, as they are made of very little wax, mixed with a great deal of tallow.

By remaining in this boudoir where there had been no fire since the night before, the police functionary had taken cold without perceiving it. This cold of his only awaited an opportunity to manifest itself, which the smoke ascending from the candlestick afforded. The occupant of the clock was unable to prevent himself from sneezing. He did his best to control his nose, but, alas! to no effect, for the sneeze he sought to smother broke forth with a terrible noise, and the shock was so great that the whistle escaped from his hand and fell to the bottom of the case. Before the chief, betrayed by this incident, had time to recover himself, the visitor, with extraordinary self-possession and agility, sprang towards the clock, put his hand to the key, which remained in the keyhole, turned it, so as to lock the door, withdrew it, put it in his pocket and fled precipitately. The chief of the detective force, caught in his own trap, was thus unable to pursue the stranger he was so anxious to catch.

A prisoner in the clock, he had not even the means of calling his subalterns to his rescue, since he had let his whistle fall, and to pick it up it was necessary for him to stoop, which the size of the clock-case would not allow. How was he to bend his knees when he was cooped up in a long, narrow enclosure, where he had barely more freedom of action than he would have had if shut up in a coffin? To cry out with all the strength of his lungs was the only means left him, and he did not fail to employ it, at the risk of rousing the rage of the assassin, who was no doubt armed, and would very likely return to quiet the chief detective in an effectual manner. However, the human voice cannot be heard very far, when it is deadened by curtains, partitions and walls. The window of the drawing-room was open, it is true, but there was the yard beyond the drawing-room and the boudoir, at the extremity of which the chief was imprisoned, and beyond this yard there was the street where Piédouche and Pigache were on guard. If a whistle is, so to say, a long-ranged carbine, the throat, to carry out the comparison, is only a pocket-pistol.

The chief might call out in every tone of voice, might vociferate till he lost his breath, no one heard him; and he was soon compelled to recognise the futility of his efforts. Besides this, he soon found that the man who had played him this ugly trick only thought of saving himself, and not in the least of ridding himself of his enemy. The strange person who came at midnight to visit a house where two murders had been committed the night before, the venturesome prowler not only did not turn back to exterminate

the man who had surprised him, but hastened to leave the cottage; and the chief heard the outer door close violently: that was all.

"He has given up the idea of finishing his work," he thought, "he leaves us to unravel the mystery of the two corpses, and now that the secret is out, he intends never to come here again. Fortunately, he won't go far; my men are there; he will be taken care of before he reaches the Rue Lhomond."

Comforted in some measure by this reflection, and confiding in the intelligence of his subordinates, the prisoner resigned himself, without much trouble, to waiting for his deliverance. But neither Piédouche, Pigache, nor any one else came. Ten minutes, a quarter of an hour, half an hour elapsed without any of his auxiliaries giving a sign of life. Then he had to acknowledge to himself the sad truth that the assassin had succeeded in eluding their vigilance, and was now out of reach.

To describe the veteran officer's feelings under these circumstances would be superfluous. Napoleon must have felt somewhat the same when he saw Blucher and the Prussians debouch upon the battle-field of Waterloo, instead of Gronchy, whom he awaited. He had gone out to bag game, and was bagged himself. He had flattered himself that he might catch the culprit by setting a trap for him, and the trap had suddenly closed upon himself. It is well to be cool and logical, it is well to have grown old in the service, still a man is apt to delude himself as to the value of a stratagem he has invented, and feels his delusion all the more bitterly when he fails.

"Father Lecoq wouldn't have allowed himself to be caught in this way," said the chief sorrowfully to himself, after being betrayed by fortune. "Lecoq would, at least, have removed the key beforehand!" And to the sufferings of humiliated self-love was added the chagrin of having failed to serve a great social interest.

The assassin was free. He could continue to butcher men, and murder women. And this dangerous ruffian had been fairly in their grasp, when, owing to the want of a little forethought, and especially on account of a false movement, all the fruits of the wise measures advised by the old man of the Quai Conti had been lost in a moment.

"That is what comes of wanting to find out everything at one stroke," sighed the chief. "The man who grasps too much has a poor hold. If I had contented myself with setting an ordinary *mouse-trap*, my men would have collared that rascal as soon as he reached the gate. And if I had taken it into my head to catch him in the act, if I had whistled as soon as he raised the curtain instead of waiting till he got ready to carry off the corpse, we should have him now, and I should have known very well how to make him talk. This fellow isn't a mute by any means; in fact he called his accomplice in two languages. But, we shall perhaps find this accomplice," said the prisoner to himself, by way of consolation, "this Marie, or Mary, as he called her in English. But when the deuce shall I get out of this box? Those fools are capable of waiting till daylight before they relieve me; and while I am raging here, the murderer is going his way—to say nothing about my being nearly frozen, and having the cramps in all my limbs."

In fact, his situation was not a pleasant one. The martyr of public order had his body in a sheath of wood, and his back was hurt by the weight of an enormous brass pendulum. His wearied limbs refused to support him. It was freezing at six degrees below zero; the cold penetrated to his marrow, and he could barely breathe through the small hole

placed, fortunately, just before his mouth. Still he had hardly fancied he prophesied so correctly when he surmised that his sufferings would only cease with the long cold January night. The first gleams of dawn were lighting up the windows of the drawing-room, when a voice, which in no wise resembled the assassin's, called the chief by name. It may readily be supposed that he did not need to be begged to answer: "Here I am."

Faithful Piédouche darted at once into the boudoir, and the scene which then took place between him and his superior is one that cannot be described. The stupefaction of No. 29 at finding his general in a clock-case, the rage of the captive, the reproaches and excuses, the questions and answers which crossed each other, all formed a scene worthy of a farce, and the effect of which can be easily imagined. The first words of this desultory conversation were exchanged through the aperture in the clock-case, a circumstance which added still more to the drollness of the situation.

Fortunately, Piédouche always had a portable arsenal in his pocket: pincers, shears, a picklock, and other tools useful in getting at a malefactor who has barricaded himself in his last entrenchments. So he hastened to force open the door of the prison in which his chief had passed so many long and disagreeable hours. He respectfully helped him out, and at the same time offered him an arm-chair in which to rest himself, and a drink of brandy to warm him up. When sent out on night work, Piédouche always thoughtfully provided himself with a well-filled flask.

However, the chief of the criminal investigation service accepted neither the seat nor the alcohol. "I hope, at least, that you have him locked up," he exclaimed, abruptly.

"Who do you mean, patron?" rejoined the amazed detective.

"That man. The fellow who entered here at midnight, and must have left a quarter of an hour later."

"Excuse me, patron. I only saw an officer from the Prefecture, the one whom the prefect sent to you."

"Are you crazy, or are you trifling with me?"

"Neither the one nor the other, patron. Just as it struck twelve I saw an individual approach from the direction of the Rue Lhomond. He was well-dressed—in a thick overcoat, a white comforter, new silk hat, and grey gloves. He paused, stopped before the gate, opened it, and entered the house as though he were at home."

"And you d'd not spring upon him?"

"Patron, I only know my orders. You told me, when you put me on duty, to let every one pass who wished to, and not to stir unless I heard you whistle."

"All right. But when the man went out?" asked the chief, his voice trembling with rage.

"You gave me no orders as to the people who went out, patron; and as you didn't whistle I was somewhat puzzled. Nevertheless, I took it upon myself to stop the individual as he was going along by the fence, and to ask him where he came from. He was at first a little taken aback, but immediately replied: 'I belong to the establishment?'"

"And you believed that he meant, 'I belong to the police?'" cried the enraged chief.

"I didn't believe it at first, in proof of which I asked to see his card."

"And he showed it to you?"

"Yes, patron. Oh, he was all right. And he added that he came from the prefect, with an important communication for you."

"Doubly stupid!" exclaimed the chief, with his patience exhausted. "You knew very well that it wasn't yet known at the Prefecture that we were here, or that the crime was committed in the Rue de l'Arbalète."

"It did surprise me that the prefect had been already informed; but I said to myself that Pigache, on taking the mute back, had perhaps spoken about the affair to the governor of the prison, and that the governor—"

"Silence, wretch! and hear what you have done. You have let the murderer escape!"

XI.

"THE murderer!" exclaimed Piédouche, recoiling a couple of steps. "That big fellow with the nice overcoat was the murderer!"

"Yes, it was he," said the chief, angrily; "and by your stupidity he escapes us, when you had only to put out your hand to take him. You are the cause of our failure in the most beautiful affair I have ever seen since I began to operate. Your case is settled, my boy; you can pack your traps. We don't want officers who allow themselves to be duped by the first comer; for this rascal is by no means a professional in his business, and he yet sold you—you, who have been twenty years in the detective service. Why, it's shameful."

The detective hung his head and looked sad, while his superior thus reproved him, emphasizing his words with excited gestures.

Nevertheless, after the first volley, Piédouche straightened himself up a little and said with emotion: "It's true, patron, I am to blame. I deserve to be driven away. I've served twenty years, as you say, and, I can say, always with honour. But that makes no difference, we have no right to make mistakes in our business. Scratch me off. I shall die of hunger and my young 'uns also—I have three of them, and they have only me left since their mother died of a chill she caught at the wash-house. So much the worse, however; it will teach me not to believe whatever a fellow chooses to tell me in the street. And then I was too stupid—I ought to have seen by his awkwardness, and the way he showed his card, that he didn't belong to us."

"And then again, if you had noticed the number upon it; but of course you will tell me that you did not think of it," said the chief, bitterly, being beside himself from his discomfiture.

"No, I didn't think of it, any more than I noticed that the card—I remember it now—was one of the old style, an old card that the rascal must have found or bought. I have acted like a conscript. It can't be helped. There are days when one is not up to one's business. However, I couldn't remain in the service; my comrades would hear of it, and I shouldn't dare to look them in the face. Turn me off, it will serve me right, and I'll become a street-sweeper or a rag-picker, so that the young 'uns may have some bread. Oh, it isn't in hopes to move you that I tell you all this, patron," added Piédouche, who had detected an expression of pity on the chief's face. "I understand what happens to me and don't complain, and I shall never forget that you have been kind to me, any more than I shall forget the rascal who is the cause of my misfortune. I'll seek him till I find him, the villain! and I sha'n't be satisfied till I've seen him mowed down on the Place de la Roquette."

"Then you think that you would recognise him?" asked the chief, promptly.

"Yes, by his eyes. It wasn't very light, as we were a good way from the gas lamp when I stopped him; but those eyes of his glared like cat's eyes, and then his eyebrows met on the bridge of his nose. I don't speak of his comforter and overcoat; he wouldn't be stupid enough to put them on again. However, we don't know. I have them in my noddle; colour, cut, stuff and all, I should know them anywhere. And I tell you again, patron, as true as my name is Jean Piédouche, I'll collar the good-for-nothing scamp who has brought me my discharge."

"Listen!" said the chief, after a pause, "it is the first time this happens to you. A good soldier is not discharged from the service for just one fault. And, then, I don't want your children to suffer. I retain you."

"Really, patron?"

"Yes, on two conditions. The first, that you say nothing to your comrades."

"Rest easy, patron; I have no wish to pass for a fool."

"The second is that you will do the utmost possible to repair your foolishness. You were going to work on your own account; you will work for the 'establishment,' but I must have the man."

"You shall have him, patron; and if ever you need any one to throw himself into the fire for you, well—just make a sign," said Piédouche, in a choked voice.

"No speeches," interrupted the chief, "but to work! We have done some bad work to-night; let us try and do better this morning. Our numbers are at their posts?"

"They haven't budged since I gave them their orders."

"Very well. You can tell them to remain on the watch, and you will go, in the first place, to the district commissary, and tell him that I await him here to remove a corpse."

"What! patron, is there—"

"There is a man killed in the pantry," said the chief, in the same tone as he would have said, there is a China rose on the mantel shelf in the drawing-room.

"What, two!" grumbled Piédouche. "He doesn't stick at trifles, that man with the close eyebrows."

"From the Commissariat, you will go to the Rue Godot-de-Mauroy, number—"

"I know, patron; to Tolbiac's."

"Oh, come, so you are not so stupid as one might have supposed from what you did a little while ago. Yes, to Tolbiac's. You will tell him that I want him at once. You will tell him that and nothing more, do you understand?—and you will bring him with you."

"Understood, patron. Then it is M. Tolbiac who is to have charge of the affair—under your direction?"

"What business is that of yours?"

"Excuse me, patron, only I should not be sorry to know whom I have to work with; for you know, each chief has his method, and I always try to conform to it—and so, for instance, each time I have been employed by M. Lecoq—"

"Lecoq will have nothing to do with it. You will act under Tolbiac."

"And I will act straight, patron, you can count on that. Only it is a pity Father Lecoq has had enough of it, because, don't you know, he has never had his equal."

"Tolbiac will be as good when he has had a little more practice in France."

Enough talk ! Be off ! Take a cab so as to go quicker, and try and do nothing foolish."

Piédouche, delighted at being reinstated in favour, and burning with the desire to repair his blunder, saluted his chief and gained the door. "Look out for the footsteps in the snow," cried his superior ; and crossing the drawing-room he went to the partly-opened window, whence he observed with satisfaction that Piédouche made a long circuit, so as not to efface the traces left thirty-six hours before by the assassin and his mute.

Other foot-prints, more recently impressed upon the snow, appeared beside the two former tracks. These were certainly those of the nocturnal visitor, who had shut the chief up in the clock, and fortunately they were not mixed with the others. So there was a point of comparison ready at hand to establish the fact that this same visitor had already been in the house the night before, and the able officer determined not to neglect it.

For the moment he only thought of following the regular routine of operations—examining the condition of the body, ascertaining its identity, and the other steps usually taken in ordinary cases. The reasons which had led him to act differently in this instance no longer existed, for the assassin now knew that the house was occupied by the police. It was not to be expected that, having once escaped from the "*mouse-trap*," he would return to get caught. So the chief, had only to wait for the arrival of the commissary, and, in the meantime, he had nothing better to do than to visit the upper storey, where he had not yet been.

He went up and found all the keys in the doors, as on the lower floor. To the right, over the drawing-room and boudoir, there was a bed-chamber, that of a lady, and a dressing-room. The furniture was a strange amalgamation of articles of luxury and common things. No trace of disorder was visible. The bed had not been touched, but was duly made and tidy. However, the cupboards were empty, and the wardrobe in the dressing-room did not contain a single garment. This was another proof that the victim was preparing to leave on a long journey, and that she had not intended returning.

The chief was still engaged with his examination, when the noise of a cab stopping before the gate attracted him to the window. He saw the commissary, whom Piédouche had warned, *en route*, alight from the vehicle, and accordingly he hastened to receive him.

Between the functionaries who are accustomed to criminal investigations, mere hints are understood, so that the chief of the detective service had soon acquainted his colleague with the situation of affairs. Then, as he was in a hurry to finish with the Rue de l'Arbalète and return to the Prefecture, he took him straight to the pantry, where lay the body of the murdered man.

"It is he !" exclaimed the district commissary, at once.

XII.

"WHAT ! you know this man ?" exclaimed the chief, in surprise.

"Perfectly," said the commissary. "He is a merchant who disappeared on the day before yesterday, and whom his family are seeking for. His son was at my office this morning, and I was taking his declaration when Piédouche came for me. Dear me ! I did not expect, on coming here, to kill two birds with one stone."

"And I, I did not anticipate that we should so soon find a solution. You are sure that this is the body of the merchant in question?"

"Quite sure. I have met that man there twenty times in the Luxembourg gardens and at the Jardin des Plantes. He was, besides, well known in the neighbourhood, for he had spent his life there, and his father was established there before him. He was a wholesale dealer in textile goods."

"Was he rich?"

"Very rich, and his fortune is not of recent origin. It dates back two or three generations."

"His name?"

"M. Lheureux. Pierre Lheureux, Bérard & Co. was the name of the firm."

"Then he has a partner?"

"Oh, his partner does not meddle with the business. I don't think that he even lives in Paris."

"And this gentleman is married—Monsieur—what did you call him? Ah! Lheureux. There are some names which don't go well with those who bear them."

"Married, and the father of two children, too. It was the elder one who came to wake me up this morning at seven o'clock, so as to tell me of his father's disappearance. When I promised him to make inquiries, I hardly fancied they would terminate so soon."

"Those which I commenced yesterday are not nearly so far advanced. However, we have a thread—a thread which may break, it is true, but which may still bring us to the end. We shall see if Tolbiac knows how to use it."

"Tolbiac! The amateur detective who has come to us from England?"

"Yes; I have sent for him to give him the affair—that is to say, the accessory researches, for we shall work on our side. The examining magistrate has already begun operations."

"A strange man, this Tolbiac. He has some peculiar notions, and looks at you in a strange way."

"He learned his trade at another school than ours, but he understands it. I should, nevertheless, have preferred Father Lecoq. Unfortunately, he won't take up anything any more. He has made his fortune, and is about to marry his son. To be brief, he gave me a heap of bad reasons."

"While awaiting his substitute, we can, at least, commence to decipher the rebus."

"The commencement seems to me rather mixed."

"Let us try it, anyway. We have guessed some which were more difficult."

"We will say, then, that the murdered man is M. Lheureux, a merchant in easy circumstances, married, father of a family, a voter, eligible, and all that. Did he pass for a man of steady habits?"

"In his business he was regular, even a little too strict, so it is said by the tradespeople of the neighbourhood. But it is also said that, outside of his business, he amused himself a good deal. He went very often to the theatre, and was partial to *demi-monde* society."

"Even to such as can be found in the Rue de l'Arbalète. That is what I thought. He, no doubt, came here to play the gallant, and found what he didn't seek for. By the way, you ought to know the tenant of this cottage."

"Very little. I learned, by chance, that an Englishwoman had installed herself here at the end of last summer."

"An Englishwoman; that will do. With a waiting-maid of the same country, eh?"

"Yes, and this is how I came to know it. It is rather strange. An Auvergnat coal-dealer, who has his shop close by, came to tell me that these two women had taken possession of the house one fine morning after it had been vacant for three years, and that they had installed themselves there without the permission of the landlord. It was nothing serious, still I went and made an investigation, and learned that the coal-dealer had used the yard of the house to store his fagots. He was very much annoyed when the cottage was let, which was the cause of his complaint. I remember that the lady came to see me at my office—my faith! a pretty woman."

"You would recognize her?"

"I think so."

"We will go to the Morgue presently."

"To the Morgue?"

"Yes. The lady in question was found in a trunk with a knife thrust into her heart."

"The affair of the Rue du Champ de l'Alouette!"

"Precisely. You see, my dear colleague, that all the information you can furnish will be of great importance."

"Evidently; but unluckily the information I possess is very little. The lady showed me a lease for three years from the landlord. It was in proper form, so I gave the coal-man orders to take his wood away and the affair ended there."

"Then this Englishwoman lived honestly?"

"At least, she gave no cause for complaint. If she had caused scandal I should have heard of it, for princesses of the *demi-monde* are rare in the neighbourhood of the Val-de-Grâce. Besides, the Auvergnat, who had a spite against her, would have made it his business to denounce her."

"This Auvergnat must be questioned. I chatted a little yesterday with his wife. I will recommend them both to Tolbiac. Do you remember the name of the landlord of the house?"

"No; all I can recall is that he lived in England. The lease was dated at London."

"Good! But he must have a representative in Paris. We will ascertain that from the collector, who must have received the taxes. Now, then, let us resume. A foreign lady, young and pretty, without either husband or family, does not come and live in the Rue de l'Arbalète without a motive. That's certain; and, by the way, where did this M. Lheureux live?"

"Place du Panthéon."

"Within two steps. Everything is explained. The protector installed his *protégé* near his own home, and chose a street which a merchant of position can visit without compromising either himself or the resident of a decent looking cottage. That is quite to be understood. Only, why should this woman have assassinated him? You don't kill the hen that lays the golden eggs."

"She did not do so to rob him, assuredly. He has still his watch and chain."

"And even his pocket-book. See there! there is some Russian leather sticking out of the pocket of the overcoat. If it contains valuables that will settle it. However, I have an idea as to the cause of the two murders,

and the manner in which they were committed. My work is finished. Still I am curious to see first how Tolbiac will look at the affair; he has an original mind and his own methods. We will wait for him."

"You won't have to wait long," said the commissary, approaching the window. "Here is a cab stopping, and Piédouche is getting out of it."

"That's good," exclaimed the chief of the investigation service, who also came to look into the street. "He has lost no time, and was lucky to find Tolbiac. It is very fortunate indeed, for Tolbiac is often in the country, and sleeps away from home oftener than his turn. But," added the chief, "it seems to me he is in no hurry to get out. Although I told Piédouche to tell him nothing, he must divine that the case is an urgent one, and that I did not send for him to talk to him about the war in the East, or the price of stocks."

Day had already dawned some time previously, and the light of a beautiful winter sun shone on the dreary Rue de l'Arbalète, which at this moment witnessed a somewhat insignificant scene, but of a kind to attract the attention of the chief as he stood at the window on the lower floor.

Piédouche, standing before the open door of the vehicle, was parleying with a personage inside. It might have been thought that he was urging the occupant to get out, and that the latter refused. Meanwhile the coal-vendor and his wife, standing on the door-step of their shop, looked on curiously. "Those folks ought to have been shut up in their hole for the time being," said the chief between his teeth.

However, M. Tolbiac—for it was he—at last consented to get out of the cab, and appeared enveloped in a large fur-lined cloak, the collar of which, turned up to his ears, concealed three-quarters of his face. He again hesitated a few seconds, then, perceiving the chief of the criminal investigation service and the commissary making friendly signs to him from the window, he pushed open the gate, and with a swift glance to the right and left, entered the yard.

"Well! well!" exclaimed the chief, "I thought for a moment that he intended to steal away like Father Lecoq."

XIII.

PIÉDOUCHE told the cabman to draw up a little distance off, so as not to attract the attention of passers-by, and then went and placed himself in front of the Auvergnat couple, who quickly retreated into their dingy shop.

In the meantime, M. Tolbiac walked towards the steps of the cottage, keeping close to the wall and walking on tiptoe.

"That's a man who has the instinct of his profession," said the chief to the commissary. "There is no danger of his stumbling among the foot-prints in the yard, and spoiling the tracks of the assassin for us."

"That's so," whispered the commissary. "He is so very careful that he almost avoids leaving his own. One would think he was walking on eggs."

The precaution was useless, however, for the cold had hardened the snow, and the pale sun had not yet softened it. M. Tolbiac, no doubt, perceived that there was no danger of creating confusion, for he began to tread more firmly on the ground, which retained no impression. However, he nevertheless, took the pains to make a circuit so as not to efface the old tracks, and when he reached the window the chief said to him, smiling:

"Bravo ! my dear Tolbiac. That's what we may call a skilful entry. A novice would have cut right across."

The amateur detective did not reply, but ascended the steps, not without hesitating a little, and finally entered the cottage.

The chief and the commissary awaited him in the hall. "Come in here," said the chief, opening the door of the drawing-room. "We must chat before we go to work."

M. Tolbiac allowed himself to be pushed into the apartment which preceded the boudoir, and the two functionaries followed him. "What is the matter ?" he asked, as he turned down the collar of his cloak.

His face, which he had carefully concealed since he left the cab, could now be seen. It was that of a man of forty or forty-five years of age, clean shaved and with regular features, which only bespoke coldness and indifference. His forehead was smooth, his mouth without a wrinkle, and his nose, straight and slender, was quite devoid of expression. His square, prominent chin betokened, it is true, a somewhat pronounced firmness of character, but his grey eyes lacked fire, and their look was almost gentle. His complexion was uniform and almost sallow, and the lines of his face were as perfect and as rigid as those of a statue. Besides this, M. Tolbiac was of medium height, neither stout nor slender ; and there was nothing peculiar either in his appearance or bearing. It might have been said that he had been made by nature expressly to play the parts of many different persons without being recognised. This was a precious advantage for a detective, and in the present case maybe Tolbiac's physique had helped to determine his vocation.

However, on this occasion the would-be successor to M. Lecoq seemed somewhat less impassive than usual. His eyes seemed trying to read those of the chief of the detective police, and his voice was rather fuller than customary when he asked why he had been sent for.

"Don't you suspect ?" asked the chief, rubbing his hands together.

"Not the least in the world," replied the detective, coldly, "unless it is about the O'Sullivan inheritance, concerning which the prefect asked me for some information last week."

"And which you will clear up by producing the heirs, I am convinced of it, my dear Tolbiac. But, for the present, something else is in question, and we shall never have a better occasion to appeal to your talents."

"They are quite at your service."

"So much the better, for, just now, on seeing you hesitate before the gate, I was afraid—"

"Of what."

"I was afraid that you were not disposed to help us. You had the appearance of a man who is acting reluctantly."

"I never refuse to act in an affair before I know what it is, but I have yet to learn what you wish to confide to me—"

"That's true, and I am going—"

"If I had to be begged repeatedly before leaving the cab, it was because your No. 29 is a fool. Instead of letting the driver stop at the end of the street, he comes and gets out right at the door of a house which I shall probably have to return to more than once, for I suppose you did not send for me without a motive. I didn't care to be remarked by the neighbours, and I took the time to raise the collar of my cloak."

"You were quite right, my dear sir ; and I will give Piédouche a good blowing up. That fellow is certainly failing. But let us get back

to our subject. You must surely have heard about the affair of the trunk—”

“In which the body of a woman was found—*Rue du Champ de l’Alouette*?” said M. Tolbiae. “Yes—something was said to me yesterday at the Prefecture, when I went there respecting the O’Sullivan heirs; but I do not know the particulars. Nevertheless, I know that there is a mute, or what is supposed to be one—and the affair struck me as being interesting.”

He talked in detached sentences, and with precaution, just as he had walked across the yard.

“More interesting than you can believe,” said the chief, “especially for you. It belongs exactly to your specialty. It is an English affair, at least on one side. Would you be willing to take charge of it?”

At this proposal, Tolbiae remained impassive, and seemed in no hurry to answer. “You think, then,” he asked, after a pause, “that you will need to have recourse to an auxiliary?”

“Most certainly. Our numbers are good enough, when it is only a question of catching an old offender or a professional murderer; but in the present case we have to work in the world at large, and they would accomplish nothing. We must have a man outside of the establishment.”

“But—you have M. Lecoq. He combines, it seems to me, all the conditions you seek.”

“Lecoq has made his fortune, and won’t meddle with anything any more.”

“He says so; but if I stepped into his shoes—”

“It was he who spoke to me about you, and he warmly recommended you.”

“I did not think that he was so well disposed toward me.”

“You are mistaken. Lecoq appreciates merit, and yours is of the first order. And so, my dear Tolbiae, you have no excuse for refusing. The affair is an exceptional one, and you will derive honour and profit from it, for the reward will be very large. So it is understood, is it not? You accept?”

“Before I answer you, allow me to ask, in the first place, what you have done in the matter?” said Tolbiae, evasively.

“I will tell you in a few words all that you want to know; that is to say, I will give you an exposition of the affair. As to the rest, we will see to that together, for I don’t wish to influence your impressions. This is it, then: The woman found in the trunk is unknown. The examination of the body revealed nothing, and we had still to find the place where the deed was committed, when it occurred to us to let the mute loose and then follow him. It was he who brought us here, and you will presently see, when you go through the house, that he did not get us on the wrong track. You now know just as much about it as I do. Make your decision.”

“My dear sir,” replied Tolbiae, after a little reflection. “I accept on one condition.”

“You will be given all you wish.”

“That is not what I am thinking about; but, if I take hold of it, I must have *carte blanche*.”

“You know very well that we never put sticks between the spokes of your wheels.”

“I know that, but this time I want still more latitude. I have taken a look at the affair and understand it after a fashion. I wish to conduct it alone, and in my own way.”

"There will be no difficulty about that."

"Your officers will do just what I tell them, and nothing more. They will never ask me why I act in such and such a way, and I shall not be compelled to employ means which I consider bad ones. In a word, I am to be absolute master so far as the investigation is concerned."

"How much time will you need, in your opinion, to bring it to a termination?"

"A month! If within a month I don't deliver the murderer to you, all ready for the Assize Court, I will turn the affair over to your own officers."

"That's enough, my dear Tolbiac. I have consulted my superiors, and I am sure they will approve of the agreement I enter into with you. From this moment you are General-in-Chief. I have now only to furnish you with some information, and I will begin by showing you something which will interest you.—Come with me," added the chief, taking Tolbiac's arm and leading him to the dining-room.

XIV.

THE door of the pantry was open, and the first object that Tolbiac perceived on entering the dining-room was the corpse of the unfortunate merchant extended, with his skull fractured, upon the bloody floor. Tolbiac had good control of himself. His impassive face had expressed no fear, enthusiasm, surprise, or emotion of any kind since he had entered the house. Nevertheless, when he found himself suddenly confronted by this terrible spectacle, he was unable to repress a nervous shudder, and the chief of the criminal investigation service thought he noticed that he even became slightly pale. "Really," said he smiling, "one might swear that the sight of the corpse affected you, and yet it is said that our profession hardens the heart. My dear Tolbiac, I did not know you were so sensitive. We have seen many such things, you and I—if only in that room in the Rue du Sabot—the mother and two children strangled. I had goose-flesh then, but you didn't even wink; and a week later you had caught the assassin. Let us hope that this time you will find him as quickly, although you have been a little moved at the commencement."

"Moved with gratification; yes," replied Tolbiac, who had already recovered his self-possession. "I only knew a part of the affair, and it seemed to me obscure, but this discovery will throw light on it, for surely it will be easier to identify this second body than the other one."

"You are right and it is already done, my dear fellow. The man you see there is a merchant of the neighbourhood, who wrongfully entered into an unlawful *liaison* with the lady of the house. That is plain to be seen."

"You know his name?"

"Yes; and my colleague the commissary knew him personally. He is a M. Lheureux, a merchant in textile fabrics who resided on the Place du Panthéon."

Tolbiac said nothing. He seemed to be meditating on this new information.

"And, what is characteristic," continued the chief, "is that nothing has been stolen from him. His valuables are still about his person. We can, however, assure ourselves of it more completely," he added, taking the pocket-book, which protruded out of the dead man's pocket. "See! what did I tell you! two notes of a thousand francs, one of five hundred, four of

a hundred—his money has not been touched. Let us see what else there is, while we are about it—some receipted bills, some visiting-cards with the name of Charles Lheureux. Ah! a letter addressed to the same Lheureux, in a woman's handwriting."

"Let us look at it," said Tolbiac, promptly, holding out his hand.

"We will read it together, but it must be kept with the papers connected with the case."

"Let us see it at once, perhaps it is the key we are seeking."

"Dear me, there are only two lines: 'This evening, at my house, at ten o'clock precisely. The gate will be unlocked.' That doesn't tell us much. But the letter was certainly written by the murdered woman, for it is signed: 'Mary.'"

"You know, then, that this woman's name was Mary?" asked Tolbiac.

"Yes, and in explaining to you how I know it, I must tell you what I reserved as a surprise for you, and that is, that I have already seen the murderer."

"You have seen him!—where? when?"

"Here, this night. I set a *mouse-trap* and hid myself in the boudoir. At midnight a man entered the drawing-room very softly and spoke those words: 'Marie, are you there?'—first in French and then in English."

"And after that he showed himself? You saw his face?"

"Not sufficiently to recognise him. He had his hat drawn down over his eyes and a comforter over his mouth. It seemed to me, though, that he wore a full beard, and that he had heavy eyebrows."

"And you were unable to have him arrested?" exclaimed the commissary.

"Ah, I must tell you. I was foolish enough to hide myself in the clock-case. I had caught cold and unfortunately sneezed, whereupon he dashed upon me, locked me in and ran away. And the worst of it is, that my men, who were on guard in the street, let him past at sight of a detective's card which he showed them."

"A detective's card! Now we have a clue, and with that I must be very awkward not to succeed," said M. Tolbiac, whose face had lit up since the chief had spoken about seeing the assassin. "You will send me, as soon as possible, the two numbers who talked with this man."

"I will do better than that; I will put them at your service. They are 29 and 33. But, before we go any further, one question. You don't doubt, then, but what the two murders were committed by the same individual?"

"I don't doubt it."

"Still, he didn't follow the same course in both cases. The man was beaten to death, while the woman was stabbed."

"No matter. Do you want to know how I understand the two scenes? The woman drew the merchant into a snare. To my mind she was an accomplice to the first crime. She was dining with her protector, when the assassin entered softly and killed him with a single blow from a club upon the skull. They dragged the corpse into the pantry, and went into the drawing-room to deliberate over their future plans. Then the murderer, who had premeditated ridding himself of his partner, gave her a blow with a poniard in the heart and stuffed her into the trunk. The mute was forewarned. He arrived at the appointed hour and carried the trunk away on his back."

"Then, according to this theory, if the police hadn't arrested him, he would have returned with his master to fetch the other body?"

"Certainly."

"That is, at least, very probable. But how do you explain, my dear Tolbiac, that the murderer entered here last night and asked, 'Marie, are you there?' He ought to have known that she was not there."

This objection seemed to disconcert M. Tolbiac. But he soon recovered and said, coldly: "There must have been a waiting-maid."

"Yes, an Englishwoman. A neighbour told me so."

"Very well. It is the maid whose name is Marie. And she must have been in league with the murderer, for she has disappeared, has she not?"

"On the evening of the crime."

"Then her complicity is evident."

"That is my opinion. But, still, this letter, which we have found in the merchant's pocket-book, was not written by the maid."

"Why not? The mistress had, perhaps, her reasons for not writing herself."

"That may, indeed, be so. And now, as we have to do with the servant, let us go up to the room she occupied. It is the only one I have not examined."

"Come along," said M. Tolbiac, laconically.

This supplementary inspection was without result. Here, as in other rooms, everything was found in perfect order; and here also the cupboards were empty.

"The servant, like her mistress, was prepared to leave," said the chief. "If the trunks in the hall don't contain any of her clothing, that will be an additional proof that she has taken her trunk, and, consequently, that she is living, and was very probably an accomplice of the assassin. Now, then, we have nothing else to do in the house except superintend the medical and judicial examinations, at which, it seems to me, it would be useless for you to be present, for I will send you copies of the official statements. I will also communicate to you the result of the measures I shall take to find out the landlord and ascertain to whom he let the house. The rest is your business, my dear Tolbiac, and from this moment you are free to act as you think best."

"Thank you, and I give you notice that I don't propose returning to the house until I have found the assassin. It is useless to attract the attention of the neighbours."

"That's a good idea. I would, however, like to show you the footprints in the snow. Those which were left by the man who came last night and called 'Mary,' are readily distinguished from the others. If on comparing them we find that these are the same as those of the man who accompanied the mute, that will prove that the two are but one and the same."

"It would be better, I think, for you to make this comparison without me. I wish to avoid being seen. Besides, there is nothing to prevent you from taking an impression from the tracks. We will examine them together later."

"You are right, and you have no time to lose in placing your batteries, since you only ask a month to succeed."

"I will succeed before a month," said M. Tolbiac, with much more assurance than he had shown at first.

"It is fully understood," continued the chief of the detective force, "that all our people are at your service, and that I will see you at my office any time you may have anything to communicate to me, or may wish to ask anything of me. So as soon as you wish to see the mute—"

"I shall take good care not to see him," exclaimed Tolbiac. "If I were

to see him, all my plans would be spoilt : for, to enable me to make use of this mute as I expect, it is necessary he should not know my face."

"You understand that you have *carte blanche*," said the chief, pressing M. Tolbiac by the hand, whereupon the amateur detective took his leave, crossed the yard, being again very careful to raise the collar of his cloak, got into the cab, and after saying a few words to Pigache, drove away.

XV

EVERYTHING changes in this world, and fashion subdues everything to its laws, even the police service. Formerly police duties were performed methodically and officially, according to immutable regulations. Even the disguises of detectives were pre-arranged, the *mouchard* was bound to imitate a classic type of "elegant gentleman." A well-arranged wig, with whiskers artistically stuck to the cheeks, a white cravat, blue coat with gilt buttons and a decoration, such was the *ne plus ultra* of camouflage or disguisement. But the days when these practices flourished have fled, and the modern detective no more resembles the *mouchard* of the old *régime* than the usurers of now-a-days, with their horses, carriages, and opera boxes, resemble the lenders of small amounts who wore patched pantaloons and slept in dog-kennels, in the good old times. It has been discovered even in official circles that for a spy or a detective to achieve success, he must in no-wise resemble what he really is. It is not enough to don a costume ; he must assume the ways of the person he wishes to represent. It is absolutely necessary to "get into the old man's skin," as they say at theatres, where there are sometimes artistes who also know how to disguise themselves properly.

But a detective has far less facilities for deceiving than an actor. He lacks the glare of the footlights, the machinery, the traps, and, more than all, a public who ask nothing better than to be deceived.

The detective cannot play his part at a distance, he is obliged to take the man he wishes to deceive at arm's-length, and, nine times out of ten, this man is on his guard. It is easy to understand that, under these conditions, powder, rouge, false hair, false beard, borrowed elegancies and fancy decorations are of very little use. Instead of shallow appearances, substantial guarantees, an actual residence, a certain establishment, a regular life, at least surface deep, and a plausible name are required. The St. Bernards, St. Roberts, St. Firmins, and the other saints of the old police calendars, are at present so played out, that a spy foolish enough to muffle himself up in one or the other style would be at once suspected. Such noble names, borrowed from martyrology, are too transparent, and to work without attracting attention it is a hundred times better to call one's-self by the common name of Martin or Legrand. Thus, amongst the very first, had M. Lecoq done. He might even pass for being the real originator of the system which consists in operating without changing either one's name or habits of life ; for, at twenty years of age, he had conducted the most important affairs of the Prefecture without his nearest neighbours suspecting that he was anything but a quiet man of means. It was only on the day that he retired from his profession that he had become M. Lecoq de Gentilly.

M. Tolbiac, let it be understood, was also in favour of the modern method ; and if he called himself *de Vinchebray*, it was because he did not operate in precisely the same surroundings as his famous predecessor. His

specialty as a ferreter of criminals high up the social ladder, obliged him to associate with fast livers, gamblers, betting-men, and women of doubtful character. So he found it necessary to take a name such as would suit the young bloods of his acquaintance, and, at the same time, to have a suite of rooms, course of life and manners to match.

M. de Tinchebray, who was Tolbiac only to the people of the Prefecture, lived in the Rue Godot-de-Mauroy, where he occupied an *entresol* which looked out into the courtyard, leading the life of a reasonable man, provided with an income of about forty thousand francs, which he disbursed in handsome fashion without ever encroaching upon his capital. He only had two saddle-horses, with a groom of all work, brought by him from London, and he contented himself with a hired brougham. He breakfasted in his rooms, dined at the fashionable restaurants, shewed himself in the Bois de Boulogne of an afternoon, at theatrical first performances of an evening, knew all Paris—the “*tout Paris*” of the Boulevard—and was received in almost all circles of society. When he visited the *demi-monde*, which often happened, he only associated with the *élite* of the world of gallantry. He had no intimate friends, never received his habitual acquaintances at his rooms, and often absented himself without saying where he was going. But he paid his debts of honour with exactness, was a good adviser, and even obliging; did not hesitate to fight a duel, and conducted himself honourably with women; was neither a braggart, nor a prattler, in fact, his discretion could be relied on. So he passed for a very worthy man, and no one had ever inquired into his origin.

His concierge revered him, and never expressed astonishment when he saw rather seedy looking people climb the stairs leading to the apartment of this rich and respectable tenant. The fact is M. de Tinchebray loved to do good, and his reputation as a charitable gentleman exposed him to the visits of needy looking customers.

When Piédouche came to fetch him to the Rue de l'Arbalète, the good concierge took the detective, in his cap and blouse, for a poor devil seeking help for his sick wife and starving children, and he admired the zeal of his good-hearted, lodger who started at eight o'clock in the morning to visit a family in distress.

Three days had elapsed since the chief of the criminal investigation service had delegated a part of his powers to the detective of the Rue Godot. Old Lecoq's rival did not sleep over the affair. He was active and made others active also, and to avoid too frequent visits at the Prefecture, he every day met as though by chance, now in front of the Madeleine, now in the Champs Elysées, and now in the Passage des Panoramas, according as to whether it rained or was fine, a man who was modestly but cleanly dressed, and who asked him for a light, profiting by the occasion to exchange a few words with him. The stroller who thus lighted his cigar in the open air, now here and there, but always at two o'clock precisely, was Piédouche, whose zeal equalled his punctuality, for he had sworn to find the assassin who had so nicely fooled him by exhibiting a spurious pass.

On the third day then, twenty minutes before the time fixed for the usual rendezvous, M. de Tinchebray, already dressed to go out, was perusing some papers in his private room. He had just had an interview with the housekeeper whom he had lately brought over from England to take charge of his rooms, which had been too much neglected when left to the care of his groom, who was also English and rather a hard character. This housekeeper from across the Channel was not yet quite familiar with her

duties, so that M. de Tinchebray had found it necessary to give her some minute instructions. And now, for fear of missing Piédouche, he was hurrying through the examination of the various papers spread out upon his desk. These papers did not seem to have any connection with the affair of the murdered woman, for the most prominent of all was a genealogical tree, drawn in ink, on a large sheet of paper. M. de Tinchebray examined it with as much attention as if it had been that of his own race; compared it with several parchments mottled with different coloured official seals, and took numerous notes in a memorandum book he had drawn from his pocket.

"It is complete," he muttered, when he had finished his researches, "and the order of succession is clearly laid down. James O'Sullivan, who died at Poonah in the Presidency of Bombay in 1811, had four sisters, whom he had not seen for fifteen years at the time of his death. He died a bachelor, without children. He made no will, and his fortune, deposited at the Bank of Dublin, amounts to-day, with the accrued interest, to four hundred thousand pounds sterling or a little more than ten million francs. Of the four sisters, two of whom married in France and two in England, there remained on the 1st of January of this year, but four descendants of different degrees, three women and one man. None of the heirs, none of those through whom they hold their rights, ever took steps to secure possession of this fortune, for the reason that they were ignorant of its existence, their great-uncle and great-great-uncle, Major O'Sullivan, having acquired all his wealth in the service of the East India Company, and having for a long time ceased all intercourse with his family. In the collateral line, the heir of the nearest degree excludes all the others. He who dies passes, without knowing it, all his rights to the one who comes after him, and so on to the farthest removed. Now that is a pretty affair, such an affair as Father Lecoq never had in his life. Let us look at the notes respecting to the French branch. I have now to do with that alone.

"No. 1: Thérèse Lecomte, infant daughter of the late M. Lecomte, banker at Paris, who was grandson, through his mother, of Georgiana O'Sullivan, eldest sister of the Major. No. 2: Pauline Bernier, wife of a man named Pierre Cambremer, and daughter of Catherine Bernier, whose grandmother was Elizabeth, the younger sister of the late O'Sullivan. It is known that Thérèse Lecomte is living; that she resides with her mother at Boulogne-sur-Seine, and that she will obtain possession of a very fine fortune at her majority. The information respecting Pauline Bernier is less precise. It is not sure whether she is dead or not, but even if she is dead, she has left a daughter. Her husband is employed on the Orleans Railway Line. I have time to visit the two heiresses this afternoon, after chatting with Piédouche."

And so saying, M. de Tinchebray packed the genealogical tree and the certificates into a secret drawer of his desk.

XVI.

HAVING decided on his programme for the day, M. Tolbiac sent his coachman to wait for him at the corner of the Avenue Gabriel, with the brougham which he hired by the month, and which really made a very good appearance. Then, after again giving some instructions to his new housekeeper, he went out afoot, and, instead of proceeding to the Place de la Concorde by the boulevard, he turned into the Rue de Sèze, so as to pass behind the

church of the Madeleine. He had taken the precaution to light a cigar, and Piédouche, who awaited him at the appointed place, asked him for a light.

The day and the place were propitious for a chat, for the sharp wind which was blowing drove promenaders away, and the esplanade at the end of the Rue Tronchet was deserted.

Accordingly, M. de Tinchebray could prolong his talk with No 29 rather longer than usual without fear of being seen by his numerous friends, and even without too much compromising himself.

Piédouche, with his long double-breasted frock-coat, broad-brimmed hat, and gold-headed cane, had exactly the appearance of an old soldier ; and, as he had been in the service, he lacked neither the style nor bearing.

"What is there new at the 'establishment ?'" asked Tolbiac, curtly.

"Nothing. They have finished examining the trunks, and found nothing in them but some linen and dresses. Fine linen, indeed, and furbelows, and silks, and velvets, and such like. She must have been awfully well off, the woman, and I think she must have been killed for her fortune."

"They have discovered no papers, either among her clothes or in the house ?"

"No danger. The fellow who struck the blow was cunning. He burnt everything. There was nothing left but some cinders in the fire-place. Still the chief picked up a bit of an envelope, on which part of the address can be read : 'Madame Marie Fassitt.' That was the name by which the woman was known in the neighbourhood. The post office stamp can also be seen, and the letter came from Paris, from the office at the Place du Théâtre-Français."

"They have preserved it, I suppose ?"

"Yes, the patron will show it to you the first time you come to the 'establishment.'"

"Do they know the name of the owner of the cottage ?"

"Not yet ; the taxes are one year in arrears. The collector thinks that they gave a false address in London, and the chief told me to tell you that they relied on you to ascertain this in England."

"I have already written."

"He also instructed me to inform you that the footprints of the man who came on Sunday night or Monday morning are not the same as those of the night before."

"That is a detail of small importance," said Tolbiac, leisurely. "The man had, perhaps, changed his shoes. Has there been no identification at the Morgue ?" he continued without transition.

"No. The coal-woman came with her husband, but they said nothing interesting. They affirm that the lady went out but very little, and that she hardly received any one. They had noticed, two or three times, a gentleman of uncertain age who looked like a foreigner ; and within the last few days, a young good-looking fellow, who wore a full beard."

"That's the murderer," said Tolbiac, in a tone of great certainty.

"I believe it, for the description agrees very nicely with that of the rascal who spoke to me before the gate and so nicely sold me."

"That is the man you must hunt out, my boy. If you put your hand on him, I will give you a thousand-franc note out of my pocket. That will make it worth your while to stir yourself, I hope. Go in every direction and keep your eyes open. You may meet him by chance."

"Rest easy. It isn't for the thousand francs, although they would make

me awfully glad. I would put them in the savings bank for the 'young uns'—but I should arrest him well enough for nothing, the scoundrel! for he nearly made me lose my place."

"Have you made any inquiries, as I directed you, respecting that *Lheureux*?"

"The dealer in textile goods? Yes, I have; and I found out that no one suspected that he had an acquaintance in the *Rue de l'Arbalète*."

"No one; that's so," muttered *Tolbiac*. "Your information agrees with mine, and it's very strange."

"What is more strange is that the coal-people, who live next door to the cottage, declare that they never saw the merchant at the lady's house. His body was shown them and they did not recognise it."

"Perhaps this man only came at night," said the detective rather impatiently. "If you have nothing more to tell me to-day, I must go, for I'm in a hurry. Look out for the young man, and never mind the rest. The rest is my business."

"All right, *Monsieur Tolbiac*; I'm off. They'll begin to notice us. Only, what shall I tell the chief if he asks me what you are doing?"

"You can tell him that I have a clue—two rather than one—and that I will go to see him at the end of the week."

"That's sufficient. Good-day, *Monsieur Tolbiac*."

Piédouche had already turned round when he bethought himself: "I forgot to tell you that the chief has the idea in his head of teaching the mute to talk."

"What! to talk?"

"Yes: there is a teacher of deaf-mutes who comes every day to the prison, and passes two hours with the mute in his cell."

"What an idea! Why, it will take years to teach him enough to carry on a conversation."

"It seems that it will go faster than that. He is intelligent, the lad, without appearing so, and he makes astonishing progress."

"So much the better," said *M. de Tinchebray* coldly. "But I don't depend on him, and I very much hope to have completed my task before his education is finished."

And thereupon, turning his back on No. 29, he walked rapidly down the *Rue Boissy d'Anglas* to his brougham, which was standing at the corner of the *Cercle Impérial*. He jumped in and said to his coachman: "To *Boulogne*, *Quai du Quatre Septembre*, No. 96."

The horse, which was of good blood, started off like an arrow, going at an extremely fast trot up the *Avenue des Champs Elysées*; the *Arc de Triomphe* was soon passed, and then the vehicle rolled onward through the *Bois de Boulogne*.

M. de Tinchebray was not a man to haggle over expense, and as he paid liberally, he was always well served. Thus in less than three-quarters of an hour after he had given orders to his coachman, his carriage stopped before the gate of a villa which bore no resemblance to the modest cottage in the *Rue de l'Arbalète*. It was a large, handsome house, built between a courtyard and a garden, on a quay which skirts the banks of the *Seine*, opposite the gay village of *St. Cloud*. This residence, which was quite new, looked as if it belonged to some very rich gentleman who above all liked plenty of room and comfort. The architect had, for his own personal satisfaction, imitated the *Louis XIII.* style of adornment, but nevertheless he had built a residence perfectly suited to the needs of our times, with recep-

tion-rooms occupying the ground floor and kitchens in the basement, while the stables, coach-house and out-houses for the servants were consigned to a rear yard. There was also a perfect park extending behind the mansion—a park of full-grown forest trees, with lawns and flower-beds, and, so that nothing might be wanting, enlivened with two running streams.

"Those people have an income of at least a hundred thousand francs a year," said M. de Tinchebray to himself. "It is more than enough for two single women. The thing is to find out if they would bite at the bait of the O'Sullivan estate. Bah! people always bite at such a bait, even when they are rich."

It was now only necessary to play cautiously; and so without further deliberation, he rang the bell. A porter in a brown livery came and opened the gate, and directed the visitor to the door of the mansion, where a footman asked for his card.

"I have not the honour of being known by Madame Lecomte," replied the detective, who would certainly never have been taken for a man of the profession. "Will you please tell her that I have come to see her on very important business—on business which especially interests Mademoiselle Lecomte, her daughter."

The servant showed him into an elegant little sitting-room and then went to deliver the message.

A moment later a door opened, and to M. Tolbiac's surprise a young man, whose face at once attracted his attention, entered and said to him, rather curtly, "It is you, sir, who wish to see Madame Lecomte?"

"Yes, sir."

"She has sent me to receive you."

"Whom have I the honour of speaking with?"

"My name would teach you nothing, sir; besides, you have not thought it necessary to tell your own. So pray be satisfied with knowing that within a month I shall be Madame Lecomte's son-in-law."

XVII.

M. DE TINCHEBRAY bowed, and seemed in no hurry to follow up this scarcely engaging reception. "Ah! there is a son-in-law," he thought. "The *déuce*! we must make haste—or else—"

"Will you please to explain yourself, sir," continued the young man. "I repeat to you that I represent Madame Lecomte, as I am about to marry her daughter. I can therefore at once discuss with you the important business which brings you here, especially as this business you say—to my great astonishment—particularly concerns Mademoiselle Lecomte."

While the expectant son-in-law expressed himself thus drily, the detective looked at him with a persistence which bordered on rudeness. He must have had grave reasons to lead him to commit this impropriety, for as a rule he behaved like a man of good breeding.

"Monsieur," continued the young man, angrily, "I do not suppose you came here to deride me; and yet, from your manner, I should be almost tempted to believe it. Now, I declare to you that I tolerate impertinence from no one, and—"

"Excuse me, sir," interrupted M. de Tinchebray, in a most courteous tone. "I have certainly deserved the rather severe words with which you have just addressed me, and beg you to accept my apology. If I allowed

myself to look at you with rather more attention than is proper, it was because it seemed to me that I had already had the honour of meeting you somewhere. I forgot to reply to you because I was trying to recall the occurrence to my mind. You might help me, if you would do me the honour to inform me if you did not live in England a few years ago?"

"I partly received my education there, sir and, since you are so curious as to all that concerns me, my name is Louis Lecoq de Gentilly, at your service, when, and in whatever way you please," added the young man, in a tone which left no doubt as to the meaning of the last sentence.

The visitor did not take it up as might have been expected, and what was stranger, he ceased to insist upon seeing Madame Lecomte.

Although M. de Tinehebray was the most self-possessed man in the world, he had been unable to hide his surprise, and even disappointment, on hearing the name of Lecoq. But he soon recovered himself and coldly replied, "I see, sir, that I was mistaken. A resemblance, no doubt, deceived me, for your name—your names, I should say—are quite unknown to me. I wished to speak to Madame Lecomte. She is not disposed to receive me. Perhaps she will some time regret it, but however that may be, it only remains for me to take my leave."

And bowing slightly to the young man, who, however, did not return his salute, he turned on his heels and left the room. M. Lecoq did not seek to detain him, and the detective made but one bound from the doorstep to his carriage, into which he sprang saying to the driver: "To the Orleans railway station."

It was plain to be seen that the horse harnessed to the brougham did not belong to the livery stable coachman for he did not spare it. Hardly had the carriage started to cover the distance separating the Quai de Boulogne from the Boulevard de l'Hôpital, than the detective began a soliloquy, the sense of which it was difficult to guess, although he expressed himself in very good French.

"What kind of a scrape am I about to get myself into?" he asked himself, between his teeth. "That lad can be none other than the son of old Lecoq, and he is just about to marry one of the two heiresses—or, rather, the sole heiress—for the other does not inherit except in the event of this one's death. It really seems as though the devil were meddling in this. On the other hand, I am sure that I have seen the face of this young Lecoq somewhere, and I am also sure that I never met him with his father, with whom I have never spoken three times in my life. It seems to me, too, that when I saw him he was much younger. Where was it? Perhaps in London. He has just told me that he lived in England. I must look into this matter; for, if he had met me over there—But no he would have recognised me too, and apparently my face was new to him. It is true that, at that time, I wore a full beard. He, too, wears one, and perhaps it had not yet begun growing when he was on the other side of the Channel. However, in a few days I shall know what to think about it."

Here a cloud came over M. Tolbiac's face, and he again began to grumble: "Yes, I shall know the truth, but the affair with the heiress has none the less failed. What means can I adopt to negotiate with women who are about to be allied to the Lecoq family? If I proposed a compromise with them the son would be consulted, he in his turn would consult his father, and the old rascal would soon see clear through my game. Some other step must be taken—and it is dangerous to do so especially just now. No matter; I will come back one of these evening and study the surroundings

of the house—the sooner the better, for I have no time to lose. In the meanwhile, I will take my precautions with the other heiress—a workman's daughter. That will be easier, I think—only, no formal arrangement is possible with her, for she is only six years old. I will go, in the first place, and see what the father looks like, and then I'll decide to act in one way or another."

After this long conversation with himself, M. Tolbiac ensconced himself in a corner of the brougham and abstained henceforth from thinking aloud.

If the chief of the criminal investigation service had been able to see him, and, above all, to hear him, since he parted from Piédouche on the Place de la Madeleine, he would certainly have experienced some surprise; for the detective who boasted that he would arrest the author of the crimes in the Rue de l'Arbalète within a month, appeared to be occupied with something very different.

Nevertheless, the chief had absolute confidence in his auxiliary; and, perhaps, he would have thought that the able detective's movements and preoccupation were indirectly connected with the investigation with which he had been charged.

However that might be, M. de Tinchebray had regained all his calmness of appearance when his brougham drew up before the door of the building in which the offices of the Orleans Railway Company are situated. He knew the place very well, and was aware who he ought to apply to for information respecting the man he was in search of, having recently been engaged in investigating a theft committed in the offices. So he at once went to see the official, who had the employé named Pierre Cambremer under his orders, and told him that he had come to inquire about certain facts in which that individual was concerned, and which the police wanted cleared up. He asked permission not to be more explicit, as the affair was to be conducted with great secrecy, and begged leave to question this Cambremer himself.

"Nothing is easier," replied the official, "and I am quite disposed not to make your visit known, for it might damage this worthy fellow who is one of our best men. I don't know what he is accused of, but I am almost sure that he is accused wrongfully. For six years I have not had the slightest fault to find with him, and his honesty is above suspicion."

"I am convinced of that also, and I will act so as not to compromise him," said M. de Tinchebray. "It is a mere formality which I discharge. Information which we need, and which he alone can furnish. He is married, I believe?"

"No; he is a widower. He lost his wife several years ago; a woman whom he loved very much, and who belonged to a very good family. However he has a little daughter, whom he adores and whom he is bringing up himself. It is his only fault, but it is one, for he never leaves her for a minute. He brings her with him when he is on duty, and we close our eyes to this infraction of the rules. And so, to-day, he is on the line, and I am sure the little one is there also."

"Can I go and speak to him now without disturbing him at his work?" asked the detective.

"Certainly. I will have you accompanied to the switch he manages. I will be obliged to you, however, if you will not alarm his daughter. She is our spoilt child."

XVIII.

"Don't be afraid of that, sir," said M. de Tinchebray, earnestly. "The child is quite young, is she not?"

"She is a little over six years old," replied the official.

"Oh! then I can answer for it that she won't even perceive that I question her father. May I ask you what are the exact functions performed by this Cambremer?"

"He is a switchman. A rough business, I assure you, and very badly paid, I admit. He passes twelve hours out of the twenty-four in the rain, the wind, the snow, or the sun, according to the season, with only a watch-box, which he is obliged to leave every minute to attend the switch. The work he discharges does not require much strength, but it is none the less arduous, and needs intelligence and constant attention. And so our switchmen are always selected from our best men. Besides it is quite simple. A wrong direction given to a train may send hundreds of passengers to their death, and the direction depends entirely upon the switchman."

"I realise, sir, that you hold Cambremer in high esteem, and I should be really grieved were he to find himself mixed up in any disagreeable affair; but that won't happen I'm sure, for I will do all in my power to get him out of it honourably. Nor, I hope sincerely, will any evil befall his daughter. It is, however, very imprudent on his part to bring her on to the line, as an accident so easily happens."

"Oh, the little one is much beyond children of her age. And, then, she understands the running of the trains as well as the oldest employés."

While chatting, the official had rung a bell; and a man now entered, holding in his hand the round, flat cap which railroad employés familiarly call a *turntable*.

His superior said a few words to him in a low tone, and nodded to let him understand that the interview was ended. M. de Tinchebray, after thanking the official, also bowed and followed his conductor.

The detective soon perceived that this man knew that he was an *attaché* of the Prefecture of police. No one has any sympathy for officers of the detective service, well dressed as they may be, and, besides, Cambremer was greatly liked by his comrades; so it was quite natural for this man to look with repugnance upon the mission assigned to him of piloting a detective, who certainly had not come with the intention of making himself agreeable to the switchman. May be, indeed this employé would not have been greatly grieved if one of the locomotives, incessantly running up and down the rails, had crushed M. de Tinchebray and sent him to a better world, where there are certainly no detectives. However, he guided him rightly enough across the perilous labyrinth of rails which intercross in twenty directions, near a large engine-house, and conscientiously warned him to look out for the moving locomotives. But he affected to answer "yes" and "no" quite drily to the various questions asked by M. Tolbiac, and, at a couple of hundred yards from the terminus, he stopped short. "Do you see," he curtly asked, "that watch-box over there, close to the first disk? Well, it's Cambremer's. He's there and will soon come out, for train 16 is due in ten minutes. So be quick, if you wish to speak to him."

And, just as the detective opened his mouth to ask for more ample instructions, the porter turned round and darted off towards the station.

"Scoundrel!" grumbled M. de Tinchebray, "you deserve to be reported."

But he calmed down quickly on reflecting that it was better his interview with the switchman should have no witnesses. Besides, he had just perceived, twenty paces in advance of him, a little girl, who was walking along carrying a basket from which the neck of a bottle protruded.

"Is it she," thought the detective. "She is taking her father something to eat. To think that that urchin will inherit ten millions if the young lady who lives at Boulogne-sur-Seine should die before she has time to give M. Lecoq's son a baby. Yes; but then, in the first place, Mademoiselle Lecomte is in splendid health, and next, Cambremer does not suspect that the inheritance exists, and that his daughter may some day be entitled to it. I will begin by assuring myself that he knows nothing on that point."

He tried to overtake the little girl, but she walked fast, and arrived at the watch-box before him. The switchman came out, took the child in his arms, and was about to seat her on his shoulder, when he perceived the detective approaching him. Considerably astonished, he put the little girl down on the step of the cabin and went to meet the stranger, whose presence on the line he failed to understand.

"Good-day, M. Cambremer," said the detective, cordially. "So that's your pretty little girl?"

"Yes, sir," replied the switchman, hesitatingly; "but I should like to know whom I have the honour of speaking to—"

"I'll bet she is the living image of her poor mother," resumed Tolbiac.

Cambremer's face at once became gloomy, and he said in a hollow voice:

"You knew my wife then? That's astonishing—for I never saw you."

"No, my good man, I didn't know your wife; but I had occasion in days gone by to meet her mother. Her name was Madame Bernier, was it not?"

"Yes; and is it to tell me this that you've come to see me?"

"That and something else."

"Pauline, go and amuse yourself farther off, my child," said Cambremer to his daughter, who left the basket and ran off. And he added: "Take care of the right hand line. You know the up-train will soon pass."

The little one turned round laughing, threw him a kiss, and began searching for violets in the grass at the side of the embankment.

"Now then, sir," continued Cambremer, "tell me what you have to say; but speak quickly, for I shall have to go to the switch."

"It won't take long," replied the detective. "I have only to ask you for some information. Can you tell me—and it is to your interest and the interest of your daughter—what was the name of your mother-in-law before she was married?"

"I don't think I ever knew. She had been dead two years when I married my wife."

"Do you know, at least, from what part of the country she came?"

"From Picardy, I think—but I'm not sure of it. My wife was born at Abbeville. Why do you ask all these questions, if you please?"

"Because I thought your daughter might have some title to an inheritance, but I am afraid now that I was mistaken—"

"And I am sure of it. Inheritances are not for people like me. My mother-in-law worked for her living, and didn't leave her daughter a sou. And so, sir—"

A long whistle from afar cut his words short. "That's train No. 16," he exclaimed. "I must go to my switch. I have only just time. Excuse me."

And leaving his questioner to himself, Pierre Cambremer hastened to the lever, placed a few feet from his watch-box, seized it, and with some pressure, turned the disk which shewed the driver of the coming train that the road was clear. In the position he had taken to watch the locomotive, he had turned his back on M. Tolbiac, who, having nothing more to ask of the father, walked towards the spot where the child was playing. It was his way to the station, and as he walked he thought to himself :

"That man is sincere, there is no doubt about it. He is quite ignorant of the fact that his wife was the grand-niece of Major O'Sullivan. Yes, he is ignorant of it. But chance might inform him of it to-morrow, and then—then the other heirs would have to settle accounts with him—or, rather, with his daughter."

Just at this moment the child started to return. She had not found any violets, and she wished to see the gentleman who passed. She looked at him with her big blue eyes—the eyes of an angel. Her fair hair fell in long curls over her shoulders ; her cheeks were rosy, and her lips smiling. She had the appearance of a cherub fallen from the clouds.

Her father could not see her ; for he was watching train 16, which was coming on at full speed. But M. de Tinchebray saw her, and he, no doubt, admired her grace and touching beauty, for he took the notion to make her a present. He drew out his purse, in which there was plenty of gold, in view of offering her a small coin. But the child shook her head, and stood still. She had been taught to refuse gifts. M. de Tinchebray shrugged his shoulders and put his purse into his pocket again, but he did so, so awkwardly, that he contrived to strew a dozen golden louis upon the line between the two rails over which the train was about to pass. Probably he was not aware of this accident, for he continued on his way.

"Monsieur ! monsieur !" cried the little girl, who had seen the gold fall. But the gentleman did not turn round. So she sprang on to the track, and began to pick up the golden louis to return them to him.

XIX.

A PALE winter's sun shone upon this scene, certainly more dramatic than a fifth act at the Adelphi. But the drama had no spectators, for all who were there played a part in it.

Tolbiac went his way, walking rapidly towards the station, his hands in his coat pockets, and seemingly unaware that he had dropped the gold coins scattered across the line over which a locomotive and ten carriages were about to pass.

The little girl had forgotten that the train was coming. She did not see it, for her back was turned towards it, and she, darting between the two rails, conscientiously picking up the pieces of gold, and tiring herself by calling the gentleman, who either did not hear her, or who, having nothing more to say to Cambremer, did not care to stop and listen to the prattling of a little girl.

Erect upon his locomotive, like the captain of a vessel on watch, the engine-driver had not perceived the child. He had just assured himself that the indicator declared the road to be free. As a further precaution, he had looked to see if the switchman was at his post, and had seen him standing in the required attitude, with his body half bent, his hand on the lever, his head raised, and his eye vigilant.

Thus posted, Pierre Cambremer somewhat resembled the famous statue of "The Knife Grinder," to be seen in the garden of the Tuileries. It is said that the sculptor represented a slave who, while sharpening a knife, espies some conspirators. Leaning on his rudder, Cambremer, the land pilot, watched the wheeled vessel which he was charged to bring into port. This humble employé of an opulent company, this obscure combatant in the army of industry, stood there like a sentinel watching the enemy. The enemy on the iron rails was the train. An enemy one does not fight, but which one prevents from doing harm. The general whose duty it is to restrain this enemy is the general manager. The soldier is the switchman. And in the incessant battle they wage the least error brings disaster.

There are stations, over-crowded with suburban trains, in which the fight is a constant one. Over the Western Railroad, near Paris, five hundred and twenty-nine trains pass by in a single day, and each of them has to reach its destination at the specified time, and without accident, exactly as though there were a special track reserved for this particular train the whole length of the route. And, in point of fact, this has been done; for in fixing the hour of the train's departure, passage and arrival, the road has been kept free for it. The manager has regulated everything in advance. He has drawn up his time-table, which each train carries with it, and which, in technical language, is called the "scheme."

Like a great captain, he has nothing now to fear but that power which escapes all forethought; chance, fatality—the hidden strain in the axle—the stone fallen or thrown upon the track. And, like a great captain also, he can do nothing unless his orders are executed with intelligence and precision. Let a station-master be negligent, an engineer absent-minded, and what can avail the most ingenious combinations, the best ordered plans?

It is more serious still when a switchman makes a mistake. We have all seen him at his work—this man who holds the lives of passengers in his hand. He is neither better dressed nor better paid than a labourer, and he acquits himself of his formidable duties with heroic simplicity. Those who pass before him, drawn along by the locomotive, lazily lounging in the corner of a first-class compartment, barely reflect that their safety depends on him, and do not realise the importance of the movements he executes. If you wish to understand them, glance from the top of the bridge on the Place de l'Europe, on to the many converging and separating lines of the Western terminus. Seen from this point of vantage, the tract resembles an immense guitar, the rails of which represent the strings, and the signal posts, placed at each branching-off, the pegs. The trains perform on it in every sense. One would imagine them to be weavers' shuttles constantly moving.

Each of these trains, whether it arrives or departs, ought to follow a line determined upon in advance, often the only one free. If it went straight ahead, dragged along by the blind force of steam, it would dash itself into another train, for the engine-driver is without the means of preventing the shock. All he could do would be to diminish its violence, by slackening speed—like a driver who can readily restrain his horse but cannot turn him around. Fortunately, the switchman is there. He knows the road the train ought to take, and with a steady hand, he throws it on that road by pressing a lever which shifts the moving branches of the two rails, either this way or that. Let him make a mistake in a moment of forgetfulness, and the train and all those it carries are irrevocably lost.

Pierre Cambremer never made a mistake, never forgot himself. He was

a taciturn man, self-contained, especially since the death of his wife, and much above the vulgar seductions to which his comrades sometimes succumbed. Tavern revelry and pleasure parties had no attractions for him. Nor was he troubled by absent-mindedness while attending to his duties. His daughter alone could be the cause for that, for he thought incessantly of her; but she behaved most intelligently and was seldom away from him.

This was very fortunate, however, for one day when the child remained at home to recover from a heavy cold, her father almost went crazy from anxiety, and asked as a favour to be relieved. He was capable of leaving his post if the permission had not been given him. On the day of M. Tolbiac's visit, however, he had nothing to torment him, for his daughter had never been more lively or more gay. After leaving school, she had come to bring him his breakfast, and he looked forward with great pleasure to being free at six o'clock to return with her to their little lodgings near the *Barrière d'Italie*. This daily return resembled a triumphal march. On the *Boulevard de l'Hôpital*, the tradesmen came out from their shops to admire the little pet with the curly hair, and Cambremer had enough to do to prevent them from loading her with cakes.

But, at this moment he was not thinking of her. His mind was centred on train 16, the train from the provinces, which was arriving at full speed and was not more than a hundred yards from the switch. The indicator was in its place. The engine-driver had seen it and was coming forward confidently, trusting to the signal. To run to his lever, Pierre had left his daughter and the stranger who had so inopportunistically come to ask him for information. He had no need to worry about the child, who was accustomed to keep out of the way, and thoroughly knew the time when trains went off and arrived. Besides, he had taken care to warn her that a train was approaching, and he fully relied on her intelligence and tact. However, he still thought a little about the individual whom he had just abruptly parted from. His person had seemed disagreeable at first sight, and his words had not only surprised but shocked him. Pierre did not like to be talked to about his wife, whom he had passionately loved, and every time the name of Pauline Bernier was mentioned before him he frowned at the recollections of his vanished happiness so inopportunistically recalled.

Now, in overwhelming him with questions as to the origin of his poor dead wife's family, the visitor who had hunted him even to his watch-box had, at the same time, wounded his feelings and excited his irritability. Cambremer was irritable because he was proud, and this honest, worthy man's pride, was assuredly more legitimate than that of certain lazy, rich, and immoral people. It displeased him that this man should meddle with his affairs, and he asked himself by what right he had questioned him.

However, he did not at all believe in the inheritance, and it was certainly not to call the stranger back that he chanced to turn round. He had no wish to obtain revelations from him respecting this problematic inheritance, but he wished to know whether he had gone away or was waiting to continue the conversation when the train had passed.

He saw that he was already some distance off, and at the same time he espied his little one, who was running after Tolbiac without thinking of leaving the track along which the locomotive was fast approaching. But a few seconds more and the child would certainly be crushed.*

* This incident and those recorded in the ensuing chapter are founded upon fact.—
[TRANS.]

XX.

SHE was only twenty paces from Cambremer, and the locomotive had but thirty yards to cover to reach the switch. The iron monster came on snorting, shaking the earth and belching forth grey smoke, but the little girl heard it not, for the wind—a violent gale from the north—was blowing in the contrary direction. Giddy, as children are at that age, the poor little girl had forgotten her father's advice, and only thought of overtaking the stranger who had lost his gold. While still running after him, she stooped each moment to pick up the louis scattered along the track—and there was a long line of them—and did not once turn round.

It was all over with her. When the engine-driver saw the little fair angel which his locomotive was about to crush, he had no longer time to reverse the steam and apply the brakes. One man alone could save Marthe's life—the dear little innocent's name was Marthe—and that man was her father Pierre Cambremer. If, as was his duty, he remained working the switch so as to keep the train on its road, his child was lost. But it was possible for him to send it on to another track, and by doing so save Marthe's life. Only he would then commit a crime, for the train sent astray would meet obstacles against which it would be wrecked.

In saving his child, Pierre would send a hundred people to certain death; and he knew it, and could not stifle the voice of conscience, which cried out, "If you do that you are a murderer!" But then to let Marthe be crushed was a murder also—and what a murder! Cambremer already saw that darling little body mangled and crushed into a bleeding pulp, and his hair rose up on his head, and his hand pressed upon the lever in spite of him. Let him press a little harder, and the train, switched on to another track, would pass without touching her.

There remained, perhaps, ten seconds in which he was to choose between the life of his child and that of the passengers. And in that train which he might sacrifice to his paternal love, there were not only strangers seated—there were some of his comrades also. The stoker was one of his friends, and he would inevitably be killed, for the locomotive, in case of accident, always receives the first shock. What then passed in Cambremer's head was exactly what a great poet has called, "A tempest in a skull." It seemed to him as if he were going crazy. Pale, trembling, with haggard eyes, his fingers clenched the iron bar on which depended Marthe's existence. He looked at the heavy iron horse, which advanced menacingly, and seemed to see a ferocious beast rushing upon its prey.

Abruptly a new idea flashed like lightning through his excited brain. He said to himself: "It is three o'clock—train 69 leaves at 4—and until then there is nothing else—it is more than a thousand yards from here to the station—the employés will see that a mistake has been made at the switch, and will give the signal to stop—the engine-driver understands his business—I know him—he hasn't his equal for controlling an engine—he will stop in time—I shall be discharged, but Marthe will not be crushed—and no one will be killed."

This thought occupied but a second, and the unfortunate man was about to press the lever when a long whistle vibrated on his ear. The sound came from the direction of the station, and Cambremer was too experienced to be mistaken. It was a train starting—a train upon the down line.

This train would necessarily meet the up train—put off its track by the switchman's fault—and there would be a collision between the two locomotives moving in opposite directions. "Ah!" muttered Cambremer, in a strangled voice, "I had forgotten there is a special train to-day for Etampes, which leaves at fifty-five minutes past two; some rich young fellows who are going shooting. And so that they may amuse themselves, my child must die," he cried, with the laugh of a maniac. "No, no, that cannot be; their lives are not worth Marthe's. I will take them. I shall be condemned by men, but God will be my judge."

This time again he put his two hands upon the iron bar. Another second had elapsed. There remained but four in which he must decide. But he had already resolved to put an end to it.

He closed his eyes so as not to witness the passage of those he consigned to a fearful end, and commenced the pressure to displace the moving rails. The locomotive was not more than ten yards from the switch. The down-train also approached rapidly. One could hear its rumble, and see its plume of white smoke gradually lengthening. A little more pressure would render a dreadful catastrophe inevitable.

At this moment the engine-driver of the special-train blew the whistle repeatedly, in a short, sharp way, to warn the switchman. Perhaps he had a presentiment of the danger. These whistles have a language. Now slow and sad, like a wail; now harsh and imperious, like a command; an official language which all the employes perfectly understood. They appeal also these whistles to lively imaginations, and Cambremer's was excited beyond measure. It seemed to him that the locomotive said to him in whistling: "What have these young men done to you that you are about to kill them? And these fathers and mothers who, this evening, will weep for their children, will you not have pity on them? Assassin! assassin!"

Then his hands let go the bar, and his lips murmured? "No—no—I cannot—Marthe, forgive me!"

It was over. Kept on the right track, the up-train had passed on.

Like the blood of the victims sacrificed by the heathen to appease the wrath of the gods, the innocent blood of that poor little girl was to redeem the lives saved by the painful heroism of the switchman—a martyr to duty. Cambremer had the courage to look. He wished to see his darling once more before the engine annihilated her. He thought to himself, "When it is all over, I will throw myself under the wheels of the 'special.'"

She was still on the track in front of the locomotive, standing up, with her head bent forward, and examining something she had just picked up, quite unconscious of her danger. The huge black mass rushed along at full speed upon this darling little girl, whose fair hair floated in the wind. One would have likened the scene to an elephant about to trample on a dove.

Cambremer, crazed with sorrow, cleared the down-track with one spring, and hastened towards the child whom he no longer hoped to snatch from death, for the engine was almost upon her. But God permitted Marthe to turn round. She at the same time saw her father, who extended his arms towards her, and the train which was about to crush her. She put her little hands together, and fell on her knees, to await death while praying.

Then Cambremer received an inspiration from above. "Lie down," he cried in a thundering voice.

At the same moment the locomotive hid the little one from his sight. Would he find her living?

He almost hoped so, for he had calculated that Marthe was sufficiently small to save herself by lying upon the track.

If she lay quite straight and remained motionless, as though she had been part of the ground, the train might pass over her without harming her.

When her father saw her again she was extended motionless between the two rails, her face to the ground, her arms stretched out, and her basket at her side.

"She is dead," murmured the wretched switchman: "something must have struck her. My God! grant that she is only wounded."

He ran to her side, and was stooping to take her in his arms, when she raised her head.

Her blue eyes and red lips were smiling; her cheeks had their usual colour. In an instant she was on her feet, and springing to Cambremer's neck: "Oh, father!" she cried, while covering him with kisses, "how you frightened me."

He could not reply for he was fairly choking with joy. "I knew that I should have to throw myself on the ground," she continued gaily. "Your friend, the stoker, has often told me so. He saved himself once in that same way—and I, I am much smaller than he is. So don't cry, father, for I have received no harm—that is to say, yes—I have a pain in my ears, from the noise the carriages made while passing over me." And as he pressed her to his heart without uttering a word, Marthe continued, with an air of girlish pride: "I didn't lose my head, you see. I didn't let fall any of the beautiful gold coins which the gentleman dropped, nor his card, which I also found on the track. His name is in fine writing, and I cannot read anything but large writing; but I have already spelt half of it—so you will go and take his money to him, won't you, father?"

"Yes, I'll go," murmured Cambremer, "and he will have to tell me—"

But the rest of the sentence was lost in the noise. The special train passed along carrying the happy sportsmen, who little suspected the danger they had just incurred.

XXI.

ON the day following M. Tolbiac's fruitless visits to Boulogne and the Orleans Railway Station, a crowd of people stood before the door of the Morgue.*

The "queen of spades woman," as the public called the poor dead creature, the lady from the cottage, as the officials at the Prefecture said, had been exposed since the previous evening, on one of the slabs in the dead-house. The chief of the criminal investigation service had taken the precaution to have the body embalmed soon after the discovery of the crime, and had only now decided to have it exhibited to the public. The reasons which had at first prevented him from employing this mournful means of publicity no longer existed. The news of the murder having already traversed Europe, and even crossed the Atlantic, it was no longer hoped that the assassin, emboldened by silence, would throw himself into the net. He had come once and had escaped, whence it could easily be concluded that he would never

* The establishment where the bodies of people who have been murdered, who have committed suicide, or who have been killed by accident, are exhibited for purposes of identification.—[TRANS.]

again return to the Rue de l'Arbalète. The officials feared very much that he had already crossed the frontier; still they were determined not to neglect a single chance.

Now, it has been proved that, like the hare which, after scurrying through the woods returns to its starting point to be killed, murderers have a tendency to prowl around the site of their crime and the corpse of their victim. The Morgue attracts them, like as a light attracts a moth, and sometimes they are caught there. Moreover, in the present case, it was important, above all, that the woman should be identified; for as the magistrates charged with the investigation of this strange affair were unacquainted with her name and antecedents, they found themselves stopped short at the very commencement of their task.

The embalming of the body allowed its exposure to be prolonged longer than customary, which is not more than sixty-two hours; and, as the murder had made a great stir, it was, so to say, certain that at least half the population would come to witness this spectacle of a kind which the Parisians are somewhat partial to. All necessary precautions had been taken. The clerk of the Morgue was there to receive voluntary declarations, and among the public sauntered several gentlemen with excellent eyes and very quick ears, detectives, appropriately dressed, who had been placed there to listen to what was said, and watch the faces of those around them.

So the snare was set, and well set. It had been done contrary to M. Tolbiac's advice, for he asserted that this worn-out stratagem would have no result, and boasted that he would discover the culprit by means of his own while the officials were losing their time watching at the Morgue. However, the authorities had thought it their duty to proceed in this way, and so far they had seen no cause to regret their decision, for the Morgue was literally besieged by the crowd. No such gathering had been witnessed since 1840, when the body of a child was exposed for more than a year, and finally recognised. It was to be hoped that this time, also, among the thousands of men and women who came to view the body, one of them would some day or other exclaim: "That woman's name was so and so," or merely, "I saw her in such a locality, and she visited such a person."

While waiting for this desired issue, the detectives diligently watched in view of profiting by the slightest incident. Piédouche and Pigache had been added to their number, not only because they possessed aptitude for the business, but also by reason of their particular knowledge of the affair. The chief of the detective force relied especially on Piédouche, who was so anxious to repair his previous blunder that he followed the case with extraordinary zeal and ardour. The poor fellow had not yet consoled himself for having let the murderer escape. He thought of nothing but this man, and even dreamed about him at night. Fearing to forget his appearance, as he had beheld him during that short interview at the gate of the cottage, he had made a note of it in his memorandum-book. All the long overcoats and white comforters he met in the street attracted his attention at once, and, however little the individuals who wore them might have bright eyes, black beards, and heavy eyebrows, the indefatigable detective followed them excitedly. These ventures of his had not yet brought success, but still he was not discouraged. He was only enraged to think he was so little employed by M. Tolbiac. So far, his connection with the detective to whom his chief had attached him was limited to a very short daily interview.

And during this rapid open-air colloquy, Tolbiae asked for information but gave none. It is true that he had promised a gratuity of a thousand francs to his auxiliary if he caught the man who had come to the cottage that night. But, although he was not rich, Piédouche preferred honour to money, and rehabilitation to remuneration. Besides, M. Lecoq had not accustomed him to this Britannic method. M. Lecoq did his business in French style, and when he employed Piédouche he confided a great deal in him. Still Piédouche rendered justice to Tolbiac's merits, and only asked to serve him to the best of his ability.

However, on this day his superior had given him a holiday, and he had immediately asked the chief for permission to utilise his leisure by watching the people visiting the Morgue. He easily obtained this permission, and, flanked by his comrade Pigache, he had reached the Morgue at daylight. The clerk graciously allowed him the use of a room adjoining the apartment in which the body was exposed, the partition being pierced with cleverly concealed apertures, which were very convenient for examining the public. Piédouche took possession of this observatory and did not stir from it. Pigache was also there, but in the background, in reserve in case his strength should be required. Four other detectives had mingled with the crowd. They fell into line like every one else, but they made use of the familiar stage stratagem by which sixty supernumeraries can be made to represent an army. Going out by one of the doors, they re-entered the building by another with the next party of sightseers, and so arranged that one of them was always in view of the body. They were aware, however, that their comrades, Piédouche and Pigache, occupied a position of advantage behind the partition. When sportsmen realise that the game is close by they do not abandon the cover to go to breakfast, and so the six watchers contented themselves with very poor fare that day.

It was past three o'clock in the afternoon, and in January the night comes early; nevertheless, the crowd did not diminish around the little building which has replaced the old Morgue built under the First Empire, at the north-east corner of the Pont Saint-Michel. The Morgue of to-day—which ere long will be rebuilt on a more extensive scale, as with the great increase of suicides and crimes it is by no means large enough for the requirements of the city—stands, as all Parisians are aware, at the extreme eastern end of the island of La Cité, and seen from a distance, it somewhat resembles a watch-house or custom-office. We live, however, at a time when the external aspect of a prison differs little from that of a hospital, and when the public headsmen dresses like a minister of state.

The present Morgue faces a promenade planted with trees of stunted growth, and the high buttresses of Notre Dame cast big shadows over this gloomy esplanade, where the children of the neighbourhood play less noisily than on the Place Maubert. One would imagine they were afraid of waking the dead who sleep in the little white house hard by. The apartment in which the bodies are exposed is square and spacious, very high and very light. It is divided in halves by a glass partition, behind which, in two parallel lines, twelve slabs are ranged, six by six. On these slabs lie the dead bodies, or the "actors," as the Parisian loafer says. And whenever the slabs are unoccupied, the same individual remarks that there is no "performance."

On this occasion, however, the "actors" were numerous, and there was even a gala display. Never, in Parisian memory, had there been so moving and, above all, so novel a sight, for the body from the Rue de L'Arbalète

was exposed, dressed just as it was when found in the trunk. And on the woman's bosom, over her heart, could be seen the queen of spades fixed there by the assassin.

XXII.

THANKS to the embalming process, the dead woman's marvellous beauty had suffered no change, and those who had seen her alive, if only once, ought to have recognised her.

She was not the kind of woman to be easily forgotten. She was a blonde with black eyes, golden hair, and a creamy complexion—a blonde such as is seldom met in England. On looking at her half-closed eyelids and her lips partly opened, one might have sworn that she was sleeping, and would awake at the sound of her name. She held in her white, slender hands, the camelia left by the assassin. The flower was more faded than her face. Clad in her lace-trimmed *peignoir*, with grey silk stockings and rose-coloured slippers on her feet, she looked like a woman reposing before starting for a ball. But her bed was a horrible bed of marble, of that blue-grey marble which mantel-pieces and toilet slabs are made of.

Further on, in the second line, there were a couple of persons who had drowned themselves, together with a child who had been run-over, and a woman who had thrown herself from a window. These were not dressed, and had nothing but dirty leather aprons to hide their nakedness. Their poor clothing hung above them, beside many other tattered garments—wails of misery stranded here after rolling through the mire of Paris. These other bodies had been kept in the background, so that the murdered woman might attract most attention, and the end aimed at was fully accomplished, for the public only occupied itself with her. The card, especially, led to endless comment.

The human mind, particularly at Paris, is so constituted that there was more curiosity about this queen of spades than emotion at the sight of this beautiful, refined-looking woman, sleeping her last sleep on one of the slabs of the Morgue. Beside one person who murmured, in a feeling voice, "Poor woman, dead so young!" there were twenty who exclaimed, "That card is the key to the riddle," or, "I thought that card was a reporter's invention. My newspaper is certainly wonderfully well informed." And the most knowing added: "It is clear that the card means something in the affair. The police must be very stupid not to find the assassin. They have only to search among the frequenters of gambling-houses and other dens." There were even some old citizens, imbued with the principles of the illustrious M. Prudhomme, who, starting from this point, began lecturing seriously on the dangers of the absorbing passion so fruitfully cultivated at Monaco.

At the Prefecture the officials were somewhat of the same opinion as the knowing ones, and in arranging for the exhibition of the body they had been careful not to forget the accusing card. They had made this piece of coloured card-board, stained in two places with the victim's blood, conspicuous, and, to complete the effect, the poniard had been left in the wound, or rather replaced in it, and displayed its finely-carved white ivory handle. These "properties," as would be said in theatrical parlance, really had the appearance of having figured in some dark melodrama, and the ordinary visitors to the Morgue did not feel at ease, for they had never attended a like entertainment.

There were urchins playing truant from school; grisettes away from their work-rooms; shop-keepers who had come out for a moment's relaxation, just as they formerly went to see criminals put to torture; nurse-girls and fish-women, who shed more tears than even the popular melodrama "The Two Orphans" ever caused to flow. And among the crowd there was also more than one spectator astonished to find himself in a place where society was so mingled. There were men of fashionable circles, artists and authors, "irregulars" of the upper rung, and even some real ladies of high life, who were dressed for the occasion in their maids' clothes.

Piédouche, from his hiding-place, watched this singular procession, and rejoiced to see that it combined people belonging to classes of society in which the kind of game his profession obliged him to hunt is seldom found. He had indeed his own private opinion respecting the affair of the Rue de l'Arbalète; he firmly believed that the murderer was a gentleman, and not one of the criminal classes. This conviction was based upon a circumstance which was never out of his mind: professional assassins do not wear fine overcoats, new silk hats, high-heeled boots, nor silk mufflers round their necks. Now, the individual who had shown a false detective's card before the cottage gate was dressed like a prince. That, at least, was the opinion of Piédouche, who had never seen a prince except at a great distance, and who, from his peep-hole, now gazed attentively at all the better dressed sightseers as they passed in front of the glass partition.

Behind him stood his friend Pigache, philosophically eating some Gruyère cheese and bread. Pigache, only being there to lend a hand if necessary, left everything to his comrade. The door which separated the room where the two officers had taken up their position from the clerk's office was open, and the clerk's voice could be heard repeating the description of some clothing removed from a corpse, as two attendants called it over. "We say," called the clerk, "a pair of blue cloth trousers torn at the knee—shoes worn down at the heels—flat cap with vizor turned down—white blouse mended at the left wrist with black thread—the button-hole at the collar torn, and a new patch on the shoulder."

"Is that a new one they are bringing us?" asked Pigache.

"Yes, an urchin who has just been fished out of the water above the Pont de la Tournelle."

"If this continues, the twelve slabs will all be occupied," grumbled Piédouche. "Bad business. It turns away the attention of the public."

"There's no danger of that, old fellow," replied Pigache. "Drowned ones come here in showers, but a woman wearing lace at fifty francs a yard isn't often seen here. Isn't that so, Father Mulard?"

"I have been here twenty years, and I have never seen the like before," replied the clerk, and he continued: "In the left pocket of the trousers a clay pipe and package of tobacco. In the right pocket, a song-book and top."

"Good! Now the description of the body."

"A scar on the neck—some tattoo marks representing a heart pierced by an arrow on the breast—a turned up nose—straight hair—large mouth—"

"Not so loud, dash it! you prevent me from hearing," interrupted Piédouche.

"From hearing what?" asked Pigache.

"The coal-dealer's wife, who is chatting with her husband. She has stopped before the glass, two steps from here—let me listen to her. I have an idea that these coal-dealers know more about it than they admit."

It was quite true that the coal-dealers were there. Although they had already been taken into the presence of the corpse, they had wished to enjoy the pleasure of seeing it again. The examination they had undergone when they viewed the corpse by judicial orders had prevented them from examining their former neighbour at their leisure, and anxious to make up for the lost opportunity, they had this time come to look at it for their own gratification. Besides, they did not hesitate to hold forth, and to explain to the people around them that the murdered woman lived next door to their shop. The coal-woman even went so far as to say that but for her the body would never have been discovered ; and the husband declared that he knew the assassin by sight, and hoped to meet him some day or other. At the same time, they did not forget to give their address.

While the couple were thus advertising their shop, Piédouche was all ears. The worthy pair followed the route prescribed for spectators by the policemen who were present to preserve order, and after passing before the body they had reached the end of the glass partition, quite close to the wall behind which the detective was standing, listening attentively to their tattle. Unfortunately, their talk told him nothing new.

"Is it true that you saw the rascal who struck the blow?" asked a nurse, who was carrying a big moon-faced baby.

"I saw him as I see you," replied the coal-dealer, with an air of importance.

"And what does he look like? He's not a working-man, that's sure."

"Ah! no. He's dressed a great deal finer than our landlord, who is the richest tanner in the neighbourhood of the Gobelins. He has a long overcoat with a fur collar, shiny boots, and—"

The description of the assassin's splendour was interrupted by the child, which began to cry with all its lungs. To quiet it the nurse could think of nothing better than to point at the corpse and say: "Look at the lady, my darling; see how beautiful she is."

The child thereupon became quiet, and the coal-dealer continued. "He always wears a comforter—see! like the man who is coming behind us."

Now since his nocturnal colloquy with the assassin, Piédouche could not hear a comforter spoken of without his attention being aroused.

XXIII.

THIS individual, whose scarf had reminded the coal-dealer of the murderer of the Rue de l'Arbalète, had not at first attracted Piédouche's notice. It must be mentioned that, apart from his comforter, this man's attire did not in the least resemble that of the person whom the detective so well remembered. In the first place, the visitor to the Morgue wore no overcoat, although it was almost as cold as on the night of the meeting. He wore a short tweed coat and a soft felt hat. In a word, his dress was not that of a man of fashion. Nevertheless, he had grey gloves on his hands, and these gloves, quite new, and well buttoned at the wrist, contrasted with his otherwise negligent appearance.

Piédouche confusedly remembered having seen just such gloves on the hands of the individual who showed him the detective's card. To tell the truth, he was not altogether sure about it, for it is not very light at midnight in the Rue de l'Arbalète, and he bitterly regretted not having been

more precise in his observations. M. Lecoq, in his time, would certainly never have committed such a blunder.

However, there still remained the contrast between the gloves and the soft felt hat. It was a sign of value. Besides, the man pointed out by the coal-vendor wore round his neck a thick comforter, which came right up to his ears. However, this comforter, instead of being of white silk, was a woollen one of a Scotch pattern.

At a glance Piédouche took in these particulars, so insignificant to any one else, and turned to an examination of the man's face. There he failed completely. The individual with the plaid comforter and the grey gloves seemed to have a very bad cold, for he coughed incessantly, and smothered his cough with his handkerchief in such a way that not even the end of his nose could be seen. "He will leave off hiding his nose, I suppose, when his coughing fit is over," thought the detective, who did not lose sight of the man.

"Move on, gentlemen, move on," cried the policemen, so as to hasten the movement of the crowd, while the sightseers followed the line, hustling each other a little, as there were some obstinate fellows who turned round and stopped short so as to enjoy the spectacle the longer.

The coal-woman and her husband had already passed the detective's peep hole, together with the nurse and the fat baby, whom the view of the poor dead woman had quieted. The man with the comforter now approached, and was, in his turn, about to pass under Piédouche's vigilant eyes. Unfortunately, he still coughed—coughed violently enough, indeed, to shake the glass partition. But Piédouche considered that he did not cough right. "Since that fellow has held his handkerchief to his mouth," he said between his teeth, "he has had time to spit ten times. Oh! oh!" he added, "his handkerchief is of fine linen. Dash it all! so here's a fellow in an old soft hat, who has nice linen. And his shirt looks proper to me. It's funny, all this. I would give half a day's pay to see his shoes; but in a jam like this it's no go."

However, the man still advanced, squeezed in the crowd like the chief of the detective force had been squeezed in the clock, coughing harder than ever, and holding his head down with marked persistence. "He's capable of going away without my being able to see the colour of his beard, if he has any," growled Piédouche. "He's decidedly not anxious to be examined, that fellow with the cold. I've a good notion to go through the office and wait for him to leave, so as to see if the air outside will cure him."

The cougher now touched the wall, and his head was not more than six inches from the detective's eyes. But his handkerchief did not leave his face, besides, it was getting dark, and Piédouche saw nothing more. The motion of the crowd carried the suspected visitor off, and he soon passed out of the detective's sight.

Piédouche had almost decided to execute the simple manœuvre he had thought of, that is to say, leave by a side door and post himself at the main entrance to the Morgue. He would there certainly find the man with the cold, and could follow him, and even arrest him if he thought it necessary. But, to do that, he would have to give up the watch, turn it over to Pigache, who was not as capable as himself, and who, besides, had not seen the murderer of the Rue de l'Arbalète face to face.

The case was rather embarrassing, and Piédouche had but little time for reflection. He at last decided upon a middle course. "Old fellow," he

said to Pigache, "I have an idea that I've just spotted an individual who's not quite straight. Go and post yourself at the outside door. You'll easily know him. He has a soft felt hat on his head, and a plaid comforter, green and red, round his neck. Whenever you see him leave, point him out to a comrade for him to follow, and come back and tell me if he still hides his face.

"That won't take long," replied Pigache, laconically, for he was not a prattler, and off he went.

While speaking, Piédouche had looked out into the Morgue, but saw nothing interesting. People were still passing by, but would soon cease doing so, for closing time was near at hand. "I'm very foolish to worry myself about that animal," said the detective to himself when his comrade had gone away. "If he really resembled the murderer, the coal-man would have cried out. He asks no better than to meddle in the affair. I know very well that he's bragging when he pretends he has often seen the man who did the work, and yet he certainly must have seen him once or twice crossing the yard to the house. So he must know him then, and as he hasn't denounced that green comforter to the police it's because the green comforter had nothing to do with the affair. Really, I seem awfully anxious to get into a scrape. That's what comes of getting fooled once. I dash head first into something of no consequence. You can't arrest a man simply because he wears grey gloves and has the whooping-cough."

The detective had just tried to comfort himself with this remark, when the police began to bawl, "Move on, move on! closing time, closing time!"

Then the door by which people were admitted was shut, only that set aside for egress being left open, and the crowd, no longer increased by fresh arrivals, began to dwindle rapidly. At this moment a great hubbub was heard outside the windows of the clerk's office. A quarrel had taken place, and voices could be heard crying out, "Arrest him."

"Who do they want to arrest?" Piédouche asked himself. "Can it be that Pigache has collared the man with the soft hat? I shouldn't be astonished. He always goes too far, that rascal of a Pigache. After all, faith! if he has collared him, he has done well. All we shall have to do will be to let him go if we are mistaken. At all events, I must see what's up." And he walked towards the door by which his comrade had gone out.

Ere he reached it, however, it abruptly opened, and Pigache and two policemen were to be seen struggling with a man who furiously resisted. Pigache had him by the neck, and the police-officers by the arms, but they were unable to prevent him from giving them some terrible kicks, and yelling in a foreign language.

"An Englishman," muttered Piédouche, who was pursued by one fixed idea. "Can that be—"

"Wait till I tie you up, my boy," said Pigache, while passing a cord around the legs of the prisoner, who soon found himself unable to move. "It's an English thief I've just caught with his hand in a woman's pocket," added Piédouche's colleague, in answer to a questioning look from his comrade. "He fought like a starved cat, the scoundrel; but we've mastered him at last all the same."

"And the other one?" asked Piédouche, laconically.

"By jove! I thought no more about him. I was too much taken up with this wild fellow."

"The Englishman made so much racket that we preferred not to take

him to the station-house at once," said one of the policemen. "The crowd collected and wanted to kill him. As for that—"

"Shove him into a cab," interrupted Piédouche. "In the meanwhile, though, we might perhaps as well search him. These London pickpockets are as nimble as monkeys. If he were given time to turn round, he'd get rid of all he has stolen with one jerk."

"Well, then, come on," rejoined the policeman.

Piédouche proceeded thereupon to search the prisoner with due order and method. Duly bound and held by vigorous hands, the thief could no longer stir, but continued to belch forth a torrent of Britannic abuse. Piédouche commenced by extracting three chains, two watches, and half-a-dozen purses from his coat-pockets. But this booty was nothing in comparison to the godsend he found in a secret pocket of the trousers. This was an elegant pocket-book; and as he drew it from its hiding-place, a photographic carte escaped from inside. Piédouche caught it as it fell, and it needed but a glance for him to perceive that it was the portrait of the murdered woman!

XXIV.

PIÉDOUCHE, swift of hand and quick-eyed, saw the resemblance at once, and examined the picture with excited attention, turning pale with delight and muttering: "It's certainly she."

It was she, indeed; doubt was altogether impossible to any one who had seen the corpse of the murdered woman. Photography, if without other merit, has at least that of exactly and minutely portraying the object it represents. It does not always give the expression of a face as well as it renders the features, but this time it had done marvellously well. The charming creature who lay extended but a few steps off on a marble slab, again lived in this portrait, the work of a ray of sunlight. There was her gracefully rounded brow, her curling hair, smiling lips, big eyes, and arched brows; there too was the little black patch she wore low on her left cheek; and, better than everything, the expression of sweetness, the characteristic trait of her lovely face, was admirably rendered on this impression.

And as though the victim, acting on some mysterious presentiment, had wished to furnish justice with the means of avenging her death, she had been photographed seated before a table covered with playing cards symmetrically arranged, and holding in one hand a flower, in the other the queen of spades, which she was about to lay upon a jack; in a word, trying to bring the game to a favourable issue, as on the fatal evening when the murderer had surprised her absorbed in the pastime so dear to lovers.

When Christopher Columbus discovered America he must have felt similar sensations to those which at this moment moved Piédouche, who believed that chance had placed the culprit in his hands. He did not doubt but what this common thief was the assassin, or at least the assassin's accomplice. The possession of the portrait was conclusive evidence to his mind. Besides, the lady of the Rue de l'Arbalète was English, and the pickpocket also evidently came from England.

Overcome with delight, the detective had already forgotten the man in the soft felt hat, and only thought of making use of his prisoner. And to tell the truth, he did not care to share the honour of this capture with

others. At the most, he only thought of taking Pigache as his partner to a certain extent. As for hastening to the Prefecture or to M. Tolbiac's to announce his discovery, he had not the least idea of doing so ; in fact, he had quite decided not to inform his chief of the capture, until after he had obtained a complete confession from the culprit. Piédouche, it should be remembered, had his reputation to regain and a note of a thousand francs to secure—a beautiful note of a thousand francs promised him by Tolbiac. He did not wish to miss the opportunity to return to favour and leave the “young 'uns” a small inheritance.

But, to insure himself the benefit of this fortunate affair, it was absolutely necessary he should operate forthwith, without leaving the spot, and as far as possible without witnesses, for a simple detective has no right to confiscate an arrested person. The scamp whom Pigache had just caught in the very act of picking pockets would, under ordinary circumstances, follow the usual road to Poissy ; the station-house first, the dépôt next, and as a third step, Mazas. Piédouche had already somewhat exceeded his duties in searching the rascal, and strictly speaking he ought to return the pocket-book to the pocket in which he had found it, and leave the keeper of the prison the care of verifying its contents. However, he did not understand the matter in this light, and, in fact, the case was important enough to justify an infraction of the rules.

“Was it at the complaint of one of the parties he had robbed that you arrested him ?” he asked the policemen.

“No, it was your comrade who nabbed him while he was trying to rob a fat fish-woman,” answered the two policemen together.

“And she defended her purse, the jade ! The Englishman had got hold of the wrong party. She recovered her belongings and went off without waiting for anything else.”

“Good ! But there were others who were not so shrewd as she was, and as a proof, here are several purses, without taking jewelry into account,” continued Piédouche. “So, you others, pray go and find out if any one has complained. You can tell the claimants that they can call to-morrow at the Prefecture to identify their things. Meanwhile I will try and make the fellow talk.”

The policemen went out, leaving the thief temporarily in the care of the two detectives. The clerk had left his office to go and verify the description of the drowned boy whom the employés had just undressed in the room where the bodies were exposed, so Piédouche found himself alone with Pigache and the pickpocket, and no one was near by to hear the conversation about to take place.

It was the moment to strike a decisive blow. Piédouche commenced by thrusting the photograph under his comrade's nose. “Oh ! oh !” cried Pigache.

“Then you recognise it ?”

“Of course, I do !”

“And what do you say to that ?”

“That we are sure of a big reward, and that the Englishman will be made a head shorter than he is at present, on the Place de la Roquette.”

“Ah ! the rascal ! I fancied he only picked pockets. To look at his ‘mug,’ I should never have suspected this.”

While the two detectives exchanged these remarks, the Englishman, while trying to look indifferent, was evidently listening, and his face, already somewhat pale, became livid. The experiment tried by Piédouche

had succeeded beyond his expectations. He posted himself before the prisoner, and abruptly said to him, "My good fellow, you understand French as well as I do. You ought to know what is going to happen. If you were only a common pickpocket you would get off with three months in jail, but your case is clear, and I guarantee that you won't even get 'extenuating circumstances' from a jury; you will go straight to the guillotine. Yes, my fine fellow, you'll have your head cut off."

The Englishman did not say a word, but turned green. "Listen!" continued Piédouche; "I'm not cruel, and I am going to give you some good advice. You have one chance left for escape, and only one. After all, perhaps, you didn't do the deed yourself all alone; and if others are mixed up in the affair, tell me who they are—my word of honour, your frankness will be taken into account—the jury are not made of stone, and with a good lawyer, you will get off with twenty years."

The Englishman listened with an air of astonishment. He was still silent, but it was evident that he understood what was said to him very well.

"Come," said Piédouche harshly, "what are you going to do? I give you warning that I have no time to lose, and that I shall send you to some gentlemen who will find the means of making you talk. Only that won't be the same thing, and it would be better for you to confess at once."

"Confess what?" asked the pickpocket, with a marked foreign accent.

"Come now, you give in finally. I knew very well that you talked French. Now then, tell me all about the business."

"You know it as well as I do, for you took me in the act. I was stealing—that's my trade—but that's all; and in France they don't usually guillotine thieves."

"Don't be foolish. It isn't a question of purses or pocket-handkerchiefs; this is what is in question." Piédouche had prepared his effects, and while uttering the last words he suddenly held the photograph before the Englishman, who gave vent to an exclamation of astonishment. Still his face did not show any consternation, but only great surprise.

"Well! do you recognise that portrait?" cried Piédouche, triumphantly.

"Yes," muttered the man; "why, it's that of the woman lying on the marble behind the glass."

"And whom you murdered! Come, tell it quick. It will relieve you."

"I! I have just seen her dead—but I never saw her living."

"Ah, my boy, you will never get me to believe that. If you had never seen her you wouldn't have her photograph in your pocket-book."

"The pocket-book you have just taken from me? But it isn't mine."

"Bah! Who does it belong to, then?"

"To the man who had it in his coat-pocket when I stole it."

"Not a bad invention, my good fellow," said Piédouche, somewhat taken aback; "but you must prove that. Where did you steal this pocket-book? When did you steal it? And what did the man look like that you took it from?"

"He wore a coat, a plaid comforter, a soft felt hat, and grey gloves," replied the pickpocket without hesitation.

XXV.

AT this most unexpected reply, Piédouche started and changed colour. By one word the Englishman had destroyed the whole structure of his hopes,

based on premature conclusions, and the poor detective began to fear that he had committed another blunder, and was again on the wrong scent. He tried at first to persuade himself that the Englishman had lied; but the answer had come so naturally, the description of the man's clothing was so precise, that he had no reason to impugn the pickpocket's veracity.

Another, and a still more significant sign, was that, on learning what he was accused of, the pickpocket had at once recovered all his assurance. He had seemed greatly troubled when uninformed concerning the crime imputed to him, but now that the detective had explained himself clearly, he seemed very calm. No doubt the rogue had some grave misdeeds on his conscience, and had anxiously asked himself which one they reproached him with; but now that the matter was known, the accusation did not frighten him, for the simple reason that he could prove his innocence. And then, a man may be a thief, and yet be incapable of inventing so plausible a story as quickly and as easily as that.

Nevertheless, Piédouche did not acknowledge himself beaten, but began questioning again. "My boy," he said, in an off-hand way, "you would like to lead me astray, but that won't work. You pretend that you took that pocket-book from the pocket of a gentleman who wore grey gloves. Where did you meet this individual, whose description you know by heart?"

"In the line, outside the Morgue," replied the Englishman, without the least hesitation.

"Then you made the haul just now?"

"Five minutes before your policeman took me by the collar."

"Come, now, give me your story," said Piédouche, with a good-natured air, although he was choking with rage.

The farther the prisoner progressed in his explanations the more the detective realised his mistake, and the more he cursed himself. This time the Englishman hesitated a little, probably because it was disagreeable to him to have to confess his bad deeds, but he replied, with laudable frankness: "I admit that I came to Paris to pick pockets. There is nothing to do in London just now. I arrived this morning by the train from Boulogne. I didn't put up at a hotel, as I expected to leave this evening."

"We know all about that," interrupted Piédouche. "English thieves all tell the same thing. Go on with your story."

"Very well. I went to take a walk along the Boulevards and in the Champs-Élysées. I didn't do much there, for people don't walk out for pleasure as it is too cold. However, I read in a newspaper that there was an exhibition at the Morgue, and that a great many fashionable people were going there."

"And you said to yourself: 'Good! there's my chance!'"

"Yes—and I came straight here; but I was very much disappointed. I wished to choose my place in the crowd, behind some ladies, or some well-dressed gentlemen, but the police forced me to get in the line, beside some common folks. There were some coal-dealers in front of me, a man and a woman, and it wasn't worth while to explore their pockets."

"Coal-dealers, a man and a woman!" thought Piédouche, sorrowfully. "This man doesn't lie." And he continued aloud: "Of course, you don't work for half-pence. So, then, you tackled a man who was better dressed?"

"Yes, the one I described to you. He was between the coal-dealers and myself."

"That's also true," said the detective to himself, overwhelmed by the exactness of all these details.

"Just within reach of my hand," continued the pickpocket.

"Then he looked as though he might be rich?"

"No, not particularly so. I didn't tackle him right away. I thought I should lose time by doing so. However, I saw he wore gloves; and that decided me."

"Yes, grey castor gloves," said Piédouche, forcing a smile.

"And I also noticed that he often pressed his hand to the side of his coat, at the height of his breast. We fellows never mistake that gesture. It's a sign there's a pocket-book inside."

"How did you manage to collar it, since he took such good care of it?"

"I waited till we were in front of the glass, when he took to looking at the dead woman, and thought no more about his pocket. That woman is an English lady, I think, and the gentleman, oh! he was much moved—he cried, and held his handkerchief to his eyes."

"There's no longer a chance to doubt," thought Piédouche.

"Then I profited by the opportunity and took out my knife—*canif*, you say, I think—it cuts like a razor, as you can see if you try it. So I slit the coat—and took out the pocket-book."

"And the man knew nothing about it?"

"Oh, that was impossible," said the pickpocket, with a self-satisfied smile. "I understand my business. If I was arrested with my hand in that fat woman's pocket, it was because I was pushed by the crowd. I stumbled against her, and she cried out."

"And was the man you had robbed still near you, then?" asked Piédouche promptly.

"Oh, no. On going out he turned to the left, and I hurried to the right. You can understand. I wasn't anxious for his company. I was in such a hurry that I didn't look to see what was in the pocket-book."

"He turned to the left," muttered the detective.

At this moment the two policemen returned, and stated that no complaint had been received, and that the crowd had dispersed.

Their appearance produced an extraordinary effect on Piédouche. He raised his head and said to them in an abrupt way: "Take this man straight to the dépôt at the Prefecture, and beg the chief warden, on my part, to put him in a cell by himself until to-morrow morning—on the part of 29, mind, that's my number at the establishment."

"Rest easy, we'll make the request."

"And take a cab, so as to go quicker. They will pay the fare at the prison."

The two policemen at once pushed the Englishman towards the door. They had unbound his legs so that he might walk; and he followed his captors without the least resistance, and even gave utterance to this adieu, which showed that he had recovered all his self-possession: "Gentlemen, I have given you all the information you asked of me. I hope you won't forget me."

He had no sooner gone out than Piédouche, catching his comrade by the arm, cried out: "Do you know what we have done?"

"What's the matter?" asked Pigache, astonished.

"We have let the assassin escape. Yes, the assassin. It was the man I sent you to wait for at the door—for he tells the truth, this English scamp. And it's the second time this happens to me—I was stupid enough not to suspect the truth when I saw his grey gloves and handkerchief stuck close to his face. Now, look here! the governor will have me stuck up against

a wall and shot in the back yard of the Prefecture. I shall have no more than I deserve, and indeed, to save trouble, I've decided to throw myself into the water."

"No foolishness, old fellow," cried Pigache. "I won't allow it; and besides, there's no excuse for it—the man has decamped, but you have the pocket-book and the portrait—and the address of the photographer ought to be on the back."

"Yes, I've just seen it, and he is a well-known photographer too. In a quarter of an hour I shall be at his place, but I'm sure he won't be able to tell me anything. A woman who sits for her portrait for the benefit of her lover, doesn't give her name; and even if this one did, and the name of her street with it, we shouldn't be any further advanced."

"But suppose the photographer had seen the lover?"

"Yes, that would be something, but not enough; and, as true as my name's Piédouche, if I find nothing more in the pocket-book I have only to send in my resignation."

"It's not signed yet, thank God! Let's see—it has three pockets, this devilish pocket-book! The portrait was in the middle one; inspect the other two before you throw the handle after the hatchet."

Piédouche opened the first one, and exclaimed at once. "Some bank-notes! it only needed that! This time my reckoning's settled."

"And why?"

"Because I'm now obliged to go and take the pocket-book straight to the Prefecture, and to tell my story to the governor. Look! there are five notes, each for a thousand francs. That again proves that the Englishman didn't lie; pickpockets never have any money about them but what they have stolen during the day. No way of keeping these rags even till to-morrow; it's enough for people to say I am a fool, I don't want to pass for a thief besides."

"Very well, go and deliver them up and let us talk no more about it."

"But you don't understand, then, that if I only had two days before me without being obliged to render an account, I might be able to catch the man, and I had sworn to myself that I'd find him and have the reward and the honour and all, whereas now—"

While still expressing himself in these vehement terms, Piédouche had opened the third compartment of the pocket-book. He took out a card he found inside it, and had hardly glanced at it than he exclaimed. "An address!—two names!—ah! I sha'n't sleep in the Seine to-night, and the young 'uns will be rich after all! Come, old fellow, come, I've a sure thing now; to-morrow the governor will thank me for not having brought him the money."

And, dragging his comrade after him, Piédouche rushed into the street, without taking the trouble to wait for the clerk who had not yet returned.

"He's certainly crazy," growled Pigache as he walked along.

XXVI.

CHASTE loves are like fortunate nations—they have no histories. Since Louis Lecoq had loved Thérèse Lecomte, not a storm had arisen to trouble the peaceful life of these happy lovers, not a cloud had darkened their happiness, even for an instant. Their sky was always blue. There were

times when the son of the great detective almost regretted even that there were not more obstacles to overcome to obtain Thérèse's hand.

They had met in society, not at one of those *fêtes* where a millionaire assembles all the celebrities of both hemispheres for a night, but at the house of some mutual friends, where both felt at home. They had liked each other at first sight, and the first quadrille had decided their fate. Thérèse admitted, the same evening, to her mother, that the tall, dark young man, who had invited her to dance three times, suited her much better than the two gentlemen who were authorised to pay their addresses to her; a country squire from Poitou, and a merchant from the Rue du Sentier.

On his side Louis had, the very next day, called on his father to beg him to make inquiries respecting his partner of the night before, and to confess that this amiable young lady's beautiful eyes had conquered him. He even added that, if she accepted him for her husband, he was quite prepared to renounce celibacy.

Old Lecoq was well acquainted with the histories of many Parisian families, and in the present case he had no need to make inquiries, for he knew that the Lecomte family was honourable and wealthy. He rejoiced that his son should fix his affections in this style, for he had longed for several years to see him make an honourable entry into that class of society called the upper bourgeoisie, which has long governed France, while still complaining of being governed.

He went straight to his object, that is to say, he simply went to Madame Lecomte to tell her that Louis adored Thérèse, and that Louis would have six hundred thousand francs at the death of his father, who asked nothing better than to give him the half of it in advance to help the young man in establishing himself. Mademoiselle Lecomte, it is true, had a dowry of half a million, and a million more to receive at the death of her mother. So the marriage was a very advantageous one for M. Lecoq, junior, or rather for M. de Gentilly; for Louis voluntarily threw his ancestral name to the dogs. But intelligence is incontestably a capital, especially in Paris, and Louis had more than was necessary to become a notary, broker, manufacturer, or deputy, at his choice. And, moreover, he was quite to Thérèse's taste.

Madame Lecomte made only formal objections. She entrenched herself at first behind commonplace reasons: her daughter was not yet of age; and the young man, so far, had no position. In reality, however, the good lady was delighted to find a husband for Thérèse such as she longed for; for mothers also have their ideals, and Louis de Gentilly embodied that of the bankers' widow. Besides, M. Lecoq, a diplomat by profession, knew how to conquer this honest and artless lady, by dint of good nature and openheartedness. A future father-in-law always comes more readily to an understanding with a future mother-in-law than two future fathers-in-law would do, and above all, far better than two future mothers-in-law. So all went then as was desired. The money matters were arranged, and three weeks after their first interview Thérèse and Louis, henceforth betrothed, had permission to confess their love, pending the wedding-day, which was fixed for the first Tuesday in February.

They made the most of their time. Every evening the lover hastened to Boulogne, where his cover was laid; dined with mother and daughter, paid his court—a courtship which was very spirited, for he was greatly smitten—and did not leave till ten o'clock. The widow had only retained a temporary residence at Paris, and had established herself on the estate at

Boulogne, which her husband had bought a year before the war. She even hoped that the young married couple would consent to live there, for she loved the country, and would have liked to have them with her.

Father Lecoq came every Sunday, and whenever he presented himself, he allowed the servants to announce M. de Gentilly. He would have made many other concessions to Madame Lecomte's innocent vanity, for this marriage answered all his hopes; and in more than one way. The old detective had studied the character of his son—this son who was his only hope and consolation. He studied it as he studied a criminal case, coldly, impartially, with the clear-sightedness granted him by nature. He had recognised that his son's nature was a concentrated one. Louis had become serious and reflective, although he had been born passionate and violent.

His temperament did not at all correspond with his reason. Education had made him sedate, laborious, and cold, at least in appearance. He had very early cast aside youthful pleasures, and his comrades had never known him to be engaged in a love affair. This steadiness, which would have pleased a less sagacious father, caused M. Lecoq considerable concern.

He knew by experience that a smouldering fire may break forth into a great conflagration, and that powder, when it explodes, causes the more damage the more it has been compressed.

So he feared an explosion, and he had reason to do so. At sixteen years of age, Louis, then at a boarding-school in England, almost ran away with a little girl fourteen years old, the daughter of a farmer of the neighbourhood, and M. Lecoq thereupon sent this too inflammable school-boy to finish his education in Germany.

There it was much worse. For the young fellow conceived a terrible passion for one of the Gretchens of the university town in which he studied, a passion which would have gone to great lengths had not his father interfered. M. Lecoq thus always feared that a tempest would suddenly break upon the uniform life which Louis had since adopted; but instead of the anticipated whirlwind a gentle breeze had risen, and seemed likely to guide the young man to the port of Marriage. Father Lecoq asked nothing more of the gods.

It was no insipid inclination that Louis felt for Thérèse. On seeing her for the first time, he had received the thunderbolt which novelists talk about so much, but which so seldom strikes one in these practical days. On escorting her to her place after dancing with her, he already swore to himself that he would marry her. And he would have married her in spite of their parents, in spite of proprieties, and without a sou for dowry.

"It is very fortunate that she was not born a laundress," Father Lecoq said to himself, when the terrible boy came to tell him that he loved Made-moiselle Lecomte.

A month of daily adoration had only added fuel to this fiery love. Louis only lived for Thérèse, and the hours he spent away from her seemed to him insupportable. Nevertheless, in spite of himself, he had to remain satisfied with the evenings he was permitted to pass at the villa at Boulogne, and occupied himself with the thousand duties which are imposed upon a lover prior to marriage. Love does not dispense with the purchase of wedding presents, nor with the winding up of bachelor affairs. Louis' past ought not to have been difficult to wind up, for he was not known to have any present *liaison*, and his follies in England and Germany had gone where the old moons go. However he had, at times, his melancholy moods, but they were usually quickly dispelled by a smile from Thérèse,

Thus one evening, a few days after the Sunday on which Father Lecoq had so energetically refused to return to his old business, the lover took a rather anxious face with him to Madame Lecomte's. But the dinner brought back his gaiety; and when, on leaving table, he found himself seated near the fireside opposite the beautiful young girl he adored, he again became the most tender and also the happiest of lovers. Not to embarrass her children—for she already spoke of Louis as though he were her son-in-law—Madame Lecomte perused a newspaper, and did not try to hear the soft words they exchanged in a low tone. The excellent widow read the criminal news by preference, and she came upon a paragraph which suddenly made her exclaim: "Ah! at last!—they are about to discover the murderer of the Rue de l'Arbalète."

XXVII.

"WHAT murderer, mother?" asked Thérèse, absently.

Madame Lecomte had interrupted her just as she was talking about the wedding-tour, a beautiful tour to Italy which she had just arranged with Louis. They pictured themselves at Sorrento, on the bay of Naples, and were thinking of waiting for the spring time under the lemon trees, when this mention of the affair of the Rue de l'Arbalète broke upon their dreams of happiness like a bombshell falling in the midst of a ball-room.

"What!" exclaimed the good lady, laying the paper upon the table. "What! don't you know that a young woman was killed—that she was put into a trunk—and that the villain who murdered her also killed a merchant—a M. Lheureux, whom I recollect very well having seen in days gone by, for he had his funds at your father's bank?"

"Have you read 'Graziella,' Louis?" whispered Thérèse, who preferred to chat with her lover rather than listen to gloomy stories. "I haven't read it myself," she continued. "Mamma was not willing. But one of my friends told me it was charming. It is all about a boat—we'll have a boat, won't we, Louis?—to sail with in the evening, on the sea where there are never any tempests."

"Really," muttered the widow, somewhat scandalised, "these young girls lose their wits as soon as their marriage is talked of." And then she resumed aloud. "So, mademoiselle, it doesn't interest you if people are slaughtered in their own houses—and in the midst of Paris too! One of these days they will come and massacre us here; that'll be easy enough, for the house is close to the woods, and we have no neighbours in the winter time."

"Louis will protect us, mother," said Thérèse, looking at the handsome stalwart young man whom she loved.

"If Louis sails with you in the bay of Naples he won't be here to defend me," said Madame Lecomte, laughing.

"I believe, dear madame, that a residence at Boulogne is as safe as one in the Rue de la Paix," rejoined the young man; "but if it is unpleasant for you to remain alone, why won't you accompany us?"

"No, my children, no, I should be in your way. When I married my poor husband, we spent two weeks together at Fontainebleau; the forest there is no doubt not equal to the orange groves of Italy. But I remember that we were delighted to be there alone."

Thérèse said not a word, but one could read in her eyes that she was of the same opinion as her mother.

"And then," continued the excellent woman, "I was joking, for I'm not at all afraid. Thank God, we have some excellent servants—worthy people who have been in our service for the last fifteen years, and who would lay down their lives for me. Still, you must admit, my dear Louis, that the police are very guilty in not preventing such horrors, and, especially, in not arresting those who commit them."

If Madame Lecomte had known that the father of her future son-in-law had formerly been a professional man-hunter, she would certainly not have used this language, for she was well acquainted with the proverb which says: "There should be no talk of a rope in the house of a man who has been hanged."

But M. Lecoq de Gentilly had not cared to entertain her with a history of his past life. He had introduced himself as a gentleman whose father had made a handsome fortune in business, and as, in reality, he began life with considerable means he did not altogether pervert the truth. At the most, he did not tell the whole of it. However, the banker's widow had not neglected to obtain information before entering into negotiations, and her inquiries, confided to an honourable friend of the late Lecomte, had resulted very favourably for both father and son. The Prefecture of police alone could have stated exactly what M. Lecoq was, and the Prefecture of police is, in such matters, very discreet, unless the prevention of wrong is in question and, even in that case, it does not act without great prudence. Now, it saw no reason to debar the son of a man who had always served the criminal investigation department with unparalleled ability and honesty, from making a good marriage. Lecoq was a detective without fear and without reproach. The profit he had derived from the exercise of his profession was legitimately acquired. Why should his former chiefs oppose themselves to what took place in an honourable family? Why should they sacrifice an old service for a prejudice?

It is true that Madame Lecomte had this prejudice, and that she would have been somewhat dismayed had she learned the real antecedents of her son-in-law's father. Still Mademoiselle Lecomte would certainly have married Louis all the same, for she loved him fondly. This young girl with blue eyes and a gentle voice, was also of a passionate nature, but passionate in a very different way to her betrothed.

Louis had bursts of passion; while she had effusions. Louis blazed and Thérèse melted. She was born to devote and sacrifice herself. In giving her beauty, sweetness and grace, God had created her to be a wife and mother. She only aspired to consecrate her life to the man who had chosen her, and if he had asked her to die for him, she would have been glad to do so. But she would not have forgiven him had he loved another, and she firmly believed that he had never loved but her. Brought up among a class of people who had no knowledge of the ideas which penetrate into other social circles of Paris, she knew naught of evil, and it did not occur to her mind that her lover's youth had been less innocent than her own. In a word, Thérèse had a tendency to be jealous, even jealous of the past. Still, she thought but little of it, for she was happy in the present, and the future awaited her with smiles.

The terrible narratives which filled the newspapers had little interest for her, and the blunders of the police still less. However, although Louis, on his side, had little more reason to think of criminal subjects, he neverthe-

less considered it proper to reply to the remarks made by Madame Lecomte when she complained that so many crimes remained unpunished.

"Did you not say just now, dear madame," he asked with an earnestness which showed his desire to be agreeable to his future mother-in-law, "did you not say that they were on the track of the poor woman's assassin?"

"Not yet," replied the widow. "Only, it seems that they have had the victim embalmed, and that she has been exposed at the Morgue. They hope that she will be recognised, and then—"

"Oh, mother," exclaimed Thérèse, "what a gloomy subject! Suppose we talk about something else." And, turning to Louis, she added, smiling: "And that bracelet? You were to bring it to me this evening, and I am sure you have forgotten it. Forgotten! what an ugly word," she continued. "I forget nothing. I shall never forget, I don't know how to do so."

"Excuse me, mademoiselle," said the young man, with some embarrassment. "I intended to have gone to the jeweller's before coming here, but a mishap prevented me."

"What mishap, monsieur?" asked Thérèse, smiling. "I have a right to know."

"I was delayed by an affair—connected with the office."

"Oh, that is a very poor excuse."

"To-morrow, mademoiselle, the delay will be retrieved. You shall have the bracelet."

"I hope, my dear Louis," said Madame Lecomte, "that you will not do anything foolish in the matter of wedding presents. You begin life with a handsome fortune, but there is no harm in economy. My poor husband repeated it to me constantly, and he was quite right. I also beg of you don't—"

This very sensible discourse was interrupted by the entrance of an old servant, the same, who a few days before had introduced M. Tolbiac. "There is a man in the anteroom," he said, "who wishes to speak at once with M. de Gentilly."

"A man!" repeated Louis, somewhat surprised at this unusual way of announcing a visitor.

"Yes, sir. A poorly dressed man."

"A beggar, no doubt; but I don't understand why he comes here for me—"

"No matter, sir," said Thérèse, with a little pout which made her still more pretty, "you must go and attend to his wants. You think, perhaps, that I shall be lonesome during your absence? Not at all: I have a charming book here which mamma has allowed me to read because it is very moral—'Les Demoiselles du Ronçay,' by Albéric Second. I shall take it up, and I beg of you to remain away a long time—a very long time, for I long to find out if the two sisters get married—poor little things! they have no lovers!"

"The man isn't a beggar, monsieur," continued the servant. "He says he comes on very important business."

"Can it be the strange person who absolutely wished to see me the other day, and who was received by M. de Gentilly instead?" asked Madame Lecomte.

"Oh, no, madame. This one almost looks like a pauper. He has a face—"

What face it was the servant had no need to describe, for while he was

talking, the indiscreet visitor had partially opened the door and popped his head into the room.

XXVIII.

THERÈSE was the first to perceive a pair of little grey eyes, which looked at her with alarming persistency. She made a movement which attracted her mother's attention, and Madame Lecomte, on seeing the intruder, gave a cry of affright. The perusal of a newspaper full of horrible reports had somewhat affected her, and she was in that condition of mind experienced sometimes by the bravest after listening to ghost stories. The apparition of this stranger on the threshold of the little family sitting-room had the same effect upon her as an invasion of brigands. However Louis, who was much more excited than alarmed, promptly rose and exclaimed: "Show this man to the door."

The servant at once turned to execute the order of his future master, but it was already too late to do so. The indiscreet individual who had thus introduced himself into the room had already entered and closed the door behind him. He avoided the footman, with whom, however, he was able to contend, and advanced hat in hand, bowing to every one. He had not the appearance of a gentleman, certainly, nor that of a millionaire, for he was dressed like a labourer in his Sunday clothes. Neither had he the look of a villain, and he was too cleanly dressed to be a beggar. The widow, reassured, examined his face, in which honesty shone forth, and she already felt disposed to come to his assistance.

Thérèse appeared somewhat more affected, and her betrothed was gradually becoming violently angry. "Who gave you permission to come in here?" he asked, walking up to the man. "What do you wish? Who are you?"

"Excuse me, monsieur, madame, and all the company," replied the singular visitor, humbly. "It is M. de Gentilly and Madame Lecomte to whom I speak, is it not?"

"Yes, my friend," said the widow, who wished to avoid a scene. "Will you explain yourself?"

"Excuse me, madame," continued the man, looking at the servant out of the corner of his eye, "but what I have to tell you is very confidential, and I should like—"

"This is too much," exclaimed young Lecoq, and he took a step forward, with the intention of catching the insolent fellow by the shoulders and throwing him outside.

But Madame Lecomte again interfered. "Louis, I beg of you," she said. And to the old servant she added: "Leave us, Antoine. Only don't go far."

The stranger had not retreated on seeing M. de Gentilly walk towards him; on the contrary he had taken three steps in advance, and attentively examined the young man's features, which were in the full light of two candles standing on the table. The examination did not last for more than two or three seconds, but this devilish man's eyes seemed trying to read the depths of M. de Gentilly's soul. Thérèse noticed this inquisitorial look, and turned pale, as though some danger threatened her lover.

"Now, we are alone," continued Madame Lecomte. "I wait, sir, for you to acquaint us with the object of your visit."

"Dear me! madame, it is very simple," replied the stranger, who seemed

no longer in the least degree embarrassed. "I found a pocket-book just now, in which there is some money—a great deal of money in fact—"

"Well?"

"I'm not rich, it is true, but I'm honest, and as there was a card in the pocket-book bearing the name and address of Madame Lecomte at Boulogne, I said to myself: 'I will go direct to this lady's instead of depositing the article with the commissary of my district, and thus, perhaps, save the person who has lost the book a bad night's rest.'"

"What you say, sir, is good, very good," exclaimed the worthy lady. "Only you are mistaken. Neither my daughter nor myself have been out to-day. So we could not have lost this money."

"Then, perhaps, it belongs to M. de Gentilly—that name was also on the card."

"Does it belong to you, Louis?" asked Mademoiselle Lecomte.

"No—no—I have lost nothing," stammered the young man.

"It's singular," murmured Thérèse, who had fully noticed the effect produced upon her betrothed by this question. And turning to the stranger she said to him, "Will you please to show us this pocket-book, sir?"

"Excuse me, mademoiselle," he replied, with feigned hesitation, "of course, I don't mistrust any one here—but—you understand—I shouldn't like to make a mistake—and give the article to a person who wasn't the real owner—that is plain—"

"Madame," exclaimed young Lecoq to his future mother-in-law, "this ridiculous scene has lasted too long, and you must allow me not to tolerate this fellow's insolence any longer. I am going to—"

"Monsieur," interrupted Thérèse, addressing herself to the man whom Louis so abused, "isn't this pocket-book made of Russian leather?"

"My faith! I'm not quite sure," replied the man; "but if you told me the colour—"

"Dark red, with a gilt fastening, and two initials—an L and a G."

"There's no mistake about that. And inside how many pockets?"

"Three."

"Right. And the amount?"

To this last question Thérèse did not reply, and for a good reason. But she turned towards her lover and earnestly said to him, "Why this is your pocket-book, Louis. You had forgotten, then, that it was I who gave it you? You have a very poor memory to-day," she added, with feeling which she ineffectually tried to hide.

"Forgive me," replied young Lecoq, in a husky voice. "I did not believe, I could not believe, that this man brought me the very pocket-book which—"

"You were not ignorant that you had lost it, however, for—I forget nothing—you were very sad when you first came—and do you want me to tell what the pocket-book contained? Why, five thousand francs, the price of my bracelet. Don't blush; I forgive you now for not having brought it—but why did you hide the truth from me? You were afraid, then, of being scolded," added the young girl smiling. She had already recovered her gaiety, since she thought she had guessed the cause of her lover's agitation.

"Five thousand francs!" exclaimed Madame Lecomte. "Why, that is a large amount, and only for this gentleman, who I hope will do us the pleasure of accepting a fitting reward—"

"I! madame?" said the man, "oh, no! I need nothing. There would be

no merit in being honest if one were to accept a reward. I'm well enough paid when I think that I have prevented monsieur from losing five handsome notes of a thousand francs, and a souvenir which came to him from so pretty a young lady—that is all I want, my dear madame. All the same," he added, "it was a famous idea of mine to take a stroll to the Morgue."

"To the Morgue!" exclaimed Thérèse. "It was at the Morgue you found this pocket-book?"

"Why, dear me! yes, close to the glass screen; and it's strange that some one beside me did not pick it up, but there was a frightful crush to see the murdered woman."

"So you went there, Louis?" asked the young girl, who almost had tears in her eyes.

"Yes," he stammered; "by chance, I passed by and I went in."

"I thank you for not having told me, and I would rather not have known it."

"Now, sir," continued the stranger, "it's all straight. The description is exact. And you have just admitted that you went to see 'the queen of spade's woman.' It seems she is called so in the newspapers—journalists are always so inventive."

"Be short about it, I pray."

"Oh! it will soon be over. I have now only to give you the bank-notes and the case itself. Here in the first place, is the case," continued the worthy fellow, taking out the pocket-book. "It is certainly yours, eh?"

"Yes, I recognise it; give it to me," muttered M. Lecoq, holding out his hand.

"A moment; I must count the notes first to show you that I have taken nothing."

"That's useless, I have full confidence in you."

"No, no. It is better to do things regularly. We say: one, two, three, four, five, that's it—"

"I didn't doubt it, and it was useless for you to verify it."

"Not at all. There's also the card with your name and madame's. Fortunately it was there, for without it I shouldn't have been able to find you."

The young man made another movement to take the pocket-book, which the stranger seemed in no hurry to give to him. However, he remarked, "This time, the inventory is finished."

Then suddenly correcting himself:

"My faith! no; it's like Robert Houdin's hat, this pocket-book. I find a woman's photograph in it, also. It is no doubt mademoiselle's portrait," he added, showing the card to Thérèse.

XXIX

INSTEAD of examining the card which this singular visitor presented to her view, Mademoiselle Lecomte turned her eyes away. Her feminine instinct warned her that she ought not to look at this portrait. In the first place, she was quite sure that it was not her own, for she had never sat for a photograph. It had displeased her to surrender her likeness to a man who could reproduce it as often as he wished, and sell it to any and everybody. She had wished to keep her face for those she loved.

And then, her jealousy was already awakening. This stranger had just

told her that the portrait was that of a woman, and she was no doubt pretty, since he could mistake the likeness for hers. Why did Louis preserve this picture so tenderly? And if he had hesitated to admit that the pocket-book belonged to him, was it not because he had wished to hide his infidelity from his betrothed?

Young girls' imaginations work rapidly, and Thérèse was already spinning some heart-breaking suppositions. Madame Lecomte had not exactly the same reasons for being alarmed, but, nevertheless, this scene troubled and disquieted her. She felt, confusedly, that there was some sad mystery at the bottom of these more or less involuntarily *qui pro quos*, and that the honest finder of the pocket-book was playing a comedy, the object of which she could not divine.

As for M. Lecoq's son, his attitude plainly enough indicated that the sudden exhibition of this unfortunate photograph was a terrible blow for him. He became very pale, and held with a clenched hand on to the back of a chair.

It was the mechanical gesture made by condemned men when the sentence which cuts them off from among the living is read to them. They clutch hold of the rail of the dock just as the dying clutch at the bed-clothing which covers them. It might have been thought that Louis de Gentilly defended himself against invisible executioners who were trying to drag him to the scaffold.

The promoter of this strange scene, meanwhile, gazed calmly on his work without seemingly realising the cause of the agitation. Nevertheless, he watched young M. de Gentilly out of the corner of his eye, and lost neither a movement of his body nor a contraction of his troubled features.

"It seems that I was mistaken," he said withdrawing the card he had held before Thérèse. "Excuse me, mademoiselle, I thought it resembled you, or I should not have taken the liberty—"

"Give it to me," interrupted the young man; "that portrait belongs to me."

"And the bank-notes also, and the pocket-book as well—I know that, and I will return you everything, my dear sir—and without reward. I have already said so. A fellow may not be rich, but he's honest all the same—"

"I don't doubt it," rejoined Louis, in a husky voice, "and I beg of you to return me that—"

"When I say without a reward, I say too much," continued the stranger. "I must ask for one which won't cost you very much—permission to keep the photograph—one always looks with pleasure on the face of a beautiful person."

"I forbid you," cried M. de Gentilly, springing forward to seize the fatal card.

But the stranger did not let him take it. He drew back quickly, and placed the table between himself and the owner of the pocket-book. Then, holding the portrait close to a lamp, he leaned over to take a nearer view of it.

In the meantime, Thérèse, moved even to tears, slowly approached her lover, and whispered in his ear: "Why are you so anxious that no one should see this portrait?" And as he remained silent: "Answer me, Louis," she continued with an effort; "answer me—for pity's sake. I suffer so much."

"Well! here's something new—and something strange," said the visitor, suddenly. "Ah! dash it all! I didn't suspect that."

"What is it, sir?" asked Madame Lecomte, all in a tremble.

"Why, by Jupiter! there is only one face like that. It's precisely that of the murdered woman."

"What do you say?—that isn't possible," stammered the widow.

"Oh! I can't be mistaken, my good lady. I've just seen her at the Morgue, and it seems to me that I see her yet. A head like hers is never forgotten—there can't be two similar ones; yes, it's certainly she."

Thérèse dropped on to a chair half fainting.

"And the photograph isn't bad," continued the stranger, "it shows everything, even to the black patch on her left cheek. Monsieur, who knows her as well as I do, ought to recollect it—and, besides the dress is the same. A dress trimmed with lace—a fellow might think she had sat an hour before being killed; and, indeed, as to the card the murderer fastened on her bosom—the queen of spades—why she holds it in her hand in her portrait."

"This is too much," said M. de Gentilly, advancing with clenched fists towards the stranger. "I am resolved not to tolerate your impertinent chatter any longer. Return me that pocket-book, and leave here immediately, or—"

"Or what?" asked the stranger, returning the portrait to the pocket-book and the pocket-book to his pocket.

"I shall summon some one who will help me to take it from you by force and throw you out of doors."

"Louis, I beg of you!" exclaimed Madame Lecomte.

"I wouldn't advise you to try it," said the stranger coolly. "In the first place, I have a firm grip, and you wouldn't frighten me, even if you had the old man who brought me here, to help you. Next, it might be the worse for you, for I should go straight to the commissary of police."

M. de Gentilly was pale with rage. He became livid, and abruptly exclaimed: "If you dare to go there, I shall tell the commissary that you are a thief—and I will prove it, do you hear? for that pocket-book was taken from the pocket of a garment which was ripped open to get at it, and I can show that such is the fact. My coat still bears the rent you made. Yes, you!—for the theft was committed but a few hours since, and the stolen articles are already in your hands. That's clear, it seems to me. I am astonished at your impudence, and should have put an end to the comedy which you have played here for the last twenty minutes much sooner, if I had not been anxious to spare Madame and Mademoiselle Lecomte a painful scene."

"Oh, if it had only depended on me, all would have passed off quietly enough," said the visitor, perfectly calm. "I respect the ladies, and I do not like rows. Still, it was you, sir, who bubbled up like milk on the fire."

"Enough!" cried the young man, exasperated by this air of familiarity. "Return me that pocket-book, or keep it, it matters little to me, but go away. I would rather let you have the money you have taken from me than be mixed up, even as complainant, in a case of robbery, and I suppose you won't talk any longer of going to the commissary."

The intruder did not reply, nor did he show any signs of retiring. Having replaced the pocket-book in his pocket, he buttoned his overcoat over the precious object, and then stood turning his hat with an embarrassed air, which strongly contrasted with the assurance he had hitherto displayed. Worthy Madame Lecomte, still palpitating with the

emotion this scene had caused her, recovered her self-possession gradually, and could not help thinking that the stranger's attitude was not that of a rogue convicted of a misdeed.

Thérèse, who seemed overwhelmed, held down her head and repeated in a low voice: "He had this woman's portrait on his heart. He loved her then."

"Well! what do you wait for to rid us of your presence?" continued M. de Gentilly with a threatening air.

"I will tell you, my dear sir," began the stranger. "In the first place, get it well into your head, that I have nothing on my conscience. I believe the pocket-book was stolen from you, but in that case the thief must have lost it, for it is certain I found it."

"If monsieur had taken it from you, he wouldn't have brought it back to you," observed the widow, who wished only to conciliate the adverse parties.

"Thanks, madame," said the visitor, politely, "you have put your finger on the real truth, and I hope that will satisfy monsieur. He will understand that if I don't return this pocket-book to him it is because it contains the portrait of the murdered woman. Just think of it! The police have been searching for a week and have found nothing that could help them perhaps. I buy the *Nouveau Journal* every morning for a sou, as it comes within my means, and no later than yesterday I read that it was the duty of every good citizen to assist justice—and bless me! I flatter myself that I am a good citizen—"

"And so," asked M. de Gentilly in a faint voice, "you are resolved to go—"

"To the commissary? My faith! yes, and right away. I should have gone there at first if I had seen the photograph before I came here; but, at first, I only noticed the bank-notes and the paper which bore your name. Oh, don't be afraid," added the stranger looking fixedly at M. de Gentilly, "the authorities will return you the pocket-book and the bank-notes all right. But to have them the sooner, it would be as well for you go to the commissary's with me."

XXX.

AT this proposal, which the visitor made in a most amiable manner, M. de Gentilly was unable to conceal signs of nervous agitation. "What for?" he asked, in a harsh tone. "I have nothing to ask of the commissary. And, besides, the money is yours, since you found it. I give it to you."

"Oh, no, it isn't mine," exclaimed the stranger, gaily. "I don't spit on money when I've earned it; but these notes don't belong to me, and you would do very wrong to make them a present to the government; you must be very rich, too, not to care more about it than that; but, all the same, you will decide to come with me."

"I repeat to you that it is useless."

"That's your idea? My faith! just as you like. In fact, you will always be in time to reclaim your bank-notes; and I doubt very much if you will wait for anything else. I will go alone then, and chat with the commissary," concluded the man, preparing to bow to the company.

Madame Lecomte gave a sigh of relief. The good lady was anxious to see an end to this scene, which troubled her exceedingly.

Louis endeavoured to assume an easy attitude, and succeeded but indifferently.

Thérèse looked at him with eyes in which one could read disquietude, and another deeper and more painful feeling. "Ah, by Jupiter! it has just occurred to me," exclaimed the visitor, suddenly; "this can't go on in this way."

"What do you mean?" asked M. de Gentilly, earnestly.

"I mean to say that the commissary will ask me a heap of questions about you. He's a worthy man—I know him. I've lived in his district for ten years; but it's his business to be curious—and, besides, the police are all in a flutter since that affair of the queen of spades, and it's true they've good reason to be so. And so, you see, when I tell them that you had the portrait, they will want to question you, to find out if it was she who gave it to you." Then, perceiving that the young girl had turned pale—"It's a silly thought of mine, no doubt," he continued; "you purchased it of a photographer, of course—that's quite plain, isn't it? But it can't be helped; they are all like that, the commissaries—and mine, a good fellow, no doubt, will none the less send for you, and not later than this evening."

On hearing this, young Louis de Gentilly shuddered perceptibly.

"And, bless me, you know he won't send a servant in livery to fetch you to his office."

"The gendarmes here!" exclaimed the widow, affrighted.

"No, but it won't be much better. He will send two detectives in plain clothes no doubt, but, all the same, easily recognisable by their awkwardness; and it isn't nice to have those fellows in a house, leaving out of the question that they sometimes bring handcuffs with them for use if necessary. No, on my word of honour, if I were in the gentleman's place, I shouldn't wait for them; I should go at once to the commissary's. It takes an hour to go there from here; but after twenty minutes' conversation you would be free, and you could return this evening to reassure these ladies and bring back your bank-notes. The commissary would certainly only keep the portrait."

M. de Gentilly was silent, but the feelings which troubled his mind were reflected on his face.

"I think, my dear Louis, that monsieur is right," said Madame Lecomte. "It is best to end this foolish affair at once. We sha'n't be easy, my daughter and I, until we know that the matter is settled. So go, we will wait for you; and I hope we shall not have to wait long, for I'll have our two best horses harnessed to the brougham."

"Oh, that isn't worth while, madame," said the man. "I took a cab here, and it's waiting for me outside. We should lose time if we waited till your brougham was ready, without taking into account that it's best a private carriage shouldn't be seen at the commissary's door. The detectives would only set your coachman talking."

This reason seemed to satisfy Madame Lecomte, for she did not insist upon her proposal. Louis de Gentilly looked at Thérèse, and he thought he could divine that she was of the same opinion as her mother. Besides, he had reflected, and now appeared almost calm. "So be it," he said simply. "I will go with you, sir."

And, after pressing the hand which his future mother-in-law held out to him, he advanced to take leave of his betrothed, who was much more moved than he was himself. "Will you pardon me?" he whispered, so low that

she alone could hear him. "Will you forgive me for having caused you this sorrow?"

"Ycs," replied Thérèse, in the same tone; "for I hope you will justify yourself."

"Do you doubt it then? Do you believe me guilty of this horrible crime?"

"I don't accuse you of that," interrupted the young girl, smiling through her tears; "but when you return, you will have to justify yourself for having forgotten that I had promised you my portrait, and for having carried another person's about with you."

"I swear to you that that will be an easy task," said the lover fervently. And bowing to Madame Lecomte, he motioned the stranger, who had discreetly stood aside while this farewell was exchanged, to the door. But, seemingly out of politeness, the man refused to walk first.

The footman had fallen asleep in the anteroom, for the visit had been a long one, and he awoke with a start at the sound of M. de Gentilly's voice. He hastened to get him his hat and overcoat; but his wonder was unlimited when he saw his future master go out in the company of an individual who had by no means a fashionable appearance. However, the old servant was too well trained to take the liberty of expressing himself; only when, on opening the gate, he saw the cab on the quay, he risked this phrase by way of warning: "Monsieur will do well, I think, to go by the Point du Jour. The Bois de Boulogne is so deserted in winter time."

The young man did not answer, but walked rapidly toward the cab, followed by the stranger, who persisted in walking behind him instead of preceding him. Contrary to the custom of his kind, the driver had not thought as well to lie down inside his vehicle, instead of looking after his horses; although it was very cold, he still sat straight in his seat, the reins in one hand and the whip in the other, like the coachman of a well-kept establishment. The stranger now hastened to the door of the vehicle, made his companion get inside, and then turning hastily to the driver, whispered a couple of words which M. de Gentilly did not hear nor try to hear. It mattered little to him what address the stranger gave, for it could only be that of the commissary he had decided to go and see. The horse started off at a fast trot as soon as the travellers were seated, and the cab rolled on through the village of Boulogne.

"My faith!" said the stranger, "I'm very glad that we haven't to go through the Bois on our way. Your servant was right; at night time, in winter, it isn't pleasant there—especially when a fellow has a large sum of money in his pocket."

"Don't be afraid; I have a revolver about me," said M. de Gentilly. He was not sorry to let his neighbour know that he was armed.

"A good precaution, even when a man visits ladies," exclaimed the stranger. "I've only my skin to defend, and for that reason I never carry anything but my two fists about with me. This evening, however, I have more than my skin, for I carry five thousand francs, which are not mine, it's true. I had never seen so much at one time."

"Now that we understand each other, I hope that after our visit to the commissary," said Louis, "you will do me the pleasure to accept one of the notes for the recovery of which I am indebted to you."

"No more after than before. Jean Piédouche doesn't need payment to do his duty."

"Piédouche," repeated the young man, nonplussed by this name.

"Yes, that's my name. Nobody's perfect, you know. I am a greaser at the Omnibus works. It isn't a very brilliant calling, but it feeds a man, and I even put by a little. Such as you see me, I shall to-morrow, perhaps, put a thousand francs into the savings bank—for my young 'uns. I have three of them, I ought to tell you."

"Accept my offer, and instead of depositing a thousand francs, you will deposit two thousand."

"No danger! This pocket-book is sacred," said Piédouche, tapping his chest. "I sha'n't touch it, you may be sure. I'm too anxious to return it with its contents. However," he added, laughing, "I won't prevent you from paying for the cab. We shall have four hours' hire at least, and two of them outside the fortifications. The fact is, the commissary of my district doesn't live in the outskirts."

"Where does he live then?"

"On the island of La Cité—not far from Notre Dame."

XXXI.

"You live on the island, then?" asked M. de Gentilly.

"Yes, for ten years past," replied Piédouche. "I told you so already, in the drawing-room, but you didn't listen much to me—and it's easily understood, for she's mighty pretty, that young lady."

"But—didn't you also tell me that you worked for the Omnibus Company?"

"Yes, it is rather far from my house, but I can't give up my district, and it's fortunate I stayed there, for if I hadn't, I shouldn't have entered the Morgue to-day; I shouldn't have found the pocket-book, and you would never have seen your five thousand francs again. By the way," he continued, "what time did you go to the Morgue?"

"About three o'clock," answered the young man, abruptly.

"Well! now that's just like me. We may have met before the glass. I ought to have seen you there, and I wonder I didn't recognise you again just now—but perhaps you were not dressed the same. You changed yourself, no doubt, to come and see the ladies."

"Yes, I went home to change my clothes, and it was then I discovered the absence of my pocket-book."

"That must have startled you. By Jupiter! in your place I should have hastened to report my loss."

"I hadn't time to do so. I was expected at Boulogne."

"Of course. When a fellow's in love, and rich into the bargain, he's more eager to see his sweetheart than to run after money."

Instead of replying to this observation, based upon M. Piédouche's knowledge of the human heart, M. de Gentilly drew himself into the corner of the vehicle and seemed disposed to drop the conversation.

But this did not fall in with Piédouche's calculations, and he suddenly exclaimed: "By the way, I just thought you perhaps had another reason for keeping quiet—for you must have suspected the authorities would bother you about the photograph."

"I! not at all," replied the young man, warmly. "It isn't forbidden to carry a portrait in one's pocket."

"If it were the portrait of no one in particular, I should agree with you;

but the portrait of a woman who has been stabbed to death, packed in a trunk, and whom nobody knows, why, that's a different matter. Oh, I know very well," added Piédouche, laughing, "that it was not you who carried the trunk, because they say it was a mute, and, without compliment, you have a ready tongue.

"Still it is always annoying to have to explain oneself to the police, especially when a man is in your position. And then the detectives are distrustful. It would be all very well for you to say that you had found the portrait, or that it had been given to you; but the authorities wouldn't be satisfied with that."

While his companion gave utterance to these scarcely consoling reflections, Louis de Gentilly had dropped his air of indifference. He began asking himself if this man did not talk in this fashion in view of proposals of arrangement with him. The scruples which this man Piédouche had displayed in presence of Madame Lecomte and her daughter were, perhaps, merely a precaution on his part against a possible indiscretion, and perhaps he only wished to sell his silence, provided no one witnessed the bargain. "I admit it," replied M. Lecoq's son, without seeming to attach any importance to what he said, "the affair is most disagreeable to me. I am, as you know, about to marry Mademoiselle Lecomte, and if this story has any sequel, I may risk missing a marriage I am very anxious for."

"For a folly! a nothing!" exclaimed Piédouche, emphatically.

"It depends on you for the affair to stop right here. I have already begged you to keep the pocket-book, with all it contains—"

"Except the photograph, I suppose," interrupted worthy Piédouche, smiling.

"No doubt, but I leave you the rest—and even—five thousand francs is not much—I am rich, and I shall be still more so, for Mademoiselle Lecomte brings me a considerable dowry. On the other hand, you, my dear sir, you are unfortunately obliged to work for your living—and you have three children. Their future would be assured if I tripled the amount—and I should be quite disposed to do so, if you consented to return me that portrait."

"Fifteen thousand francs! that's handsome," sighed Piédouche.

"I haven't the amount with me," continued M. de Gentilly, earnestly; "but I'll give you my address, and if you will return me the portrait, tomorrow at four o'clock I will hand you the money."

"That is to say that you will hand me ten thousand francs only as I have already five thousand."

"Do you wish it to be twenty in all?"

Before Piédouche replied to this seductive offer, the cab door opened, and a custom-house official popped his head into the vehicle and drawled out the usual questions: "These gentlemen have nothing to declare?"

"No," growled the young man, furious at this untimely interruption.

"Well, I declare, here we are at the barrier of Paris already," exclaimed Piédouche. "How the time passes when one chats. I thought we were still in Boulogne."

As the inspection was only a formal one, the stoppage did not last long. The driver whipped up his horse, which started at full trot down the long, wide road which ends at the St. Cloud gate, and which is really but a prolongation of the Quai de Passy. It was not very late, and the shops, and especially the taverns, were still open. The animation of a populous district followed the solitude of Boulogne. If the man with the bank-notes had

entertained any fears for the money he carried in his pocket, they must now have been dispelled.

"Well!" said M. de Gentilly, "it is understood, isn't it? To-morrow you will exchange this photograph for an amount which will assure a fortune to your children—and this evening, instead of going to the commissary's, we will drive to my house—you shall see where I live, and—"

"Yes," interrupted Piédouche, "what you propose would suit me beautifully, if I were not afraid of being compromised."

"How could you be compromised? No one will know—"

"Bah! everything is known. It is that photograph that worries me. If it were proved it had passed through my hands and that I had returned it to you, I should be in a bad scrape."

"I give you my word of honour to burn it before your eyes. You can readily believe that I'm not anxious to keep it. It has already cost me enough."

"I don't deny it—I don't deny it! The thing is, you see, I fear the police like fire—and for a million I wouldn't risk getting into a bad scrape; so that—decidedly—"

"Well?"

"Decidedly, I refuse. So much the worse for my young 'uns."

"You refuse?" asked M. de Gentilly, in a husky voice.

"Well, yes. We will be none the less friends, and it is better so."

Piédouche was still speaking when, by the light of a gas-lamp, before which the cab was passing, he saw the barrel of a revolver glisten under his nose, while Thérèse's lover exclaimed: "Give me that portrait, or you are a dead man!"

"Take care, young fellow," said Piédouche, without getting at all excited, "you are spoiling your affair."

This reply fell like cold water on M. de Gentilly's anger, and he lowered his weapon.

"Remember that we are no longer on a deserted road," continued the ingenious detective, with superb calmness. "Suppose you blew my brains out, the report would be heard, the driver would stop—he knows me, the driver, in fact, he lives in my district—a crowd would collect—the police would arrive—and you would be collared and sent to prison. Then the murdered woman's portrait would do you harm."

"I only wished to frighten you," stammered M. Lecoq's son. "I was wrong—but you exasperated me."

"You will calm yourself at the commissary's. You'll see how he will settle the business. He's a good-natured man, and won't torment you long. These examinations are not so bad as people think."

Louis de Gentilly made no reply to these exhortations, which were uttered in the engaging tone a parent assumes when coaxing a child to go to the dentist's. He placed his revolver in his pocket again, almost turned his back to his companion, and remained in fierce silence for the rest of the journey.

He was evidently resigned to the disagreeable necessity of explaining himself to a commissary of police, and was preparing a justification which his recent violence made no easy task. The horse—a horse such as is seldom harnessed to a Parisian cab—covered the long line of quays with remarkable speed, crossed over the Pont-Neuf, followed the Quai de l'Horloge, where, turning abruptly to the right, and passing a large gateway, it stopped before a passage, the entrance of which was guarded by two police officers.

"Here we are, my dear sir," said Piédouche, briskly opening the door and springing out.

XXXII

"You told me we were going to the commissary's," exclaimed M. de Gentilly, who, lost in his reflections, had taken no note of the road followed by the cab.

"It is all the same, dear sir," replied Piédouche, graciously; "we are here at the Prefecture of police."

The young man looked outside, saw the police officers, the dark passage, the high walls which enclosed this gloomy place, and threw himself back into the vehicle. He at last understood the truth. Instinctively he tried to escape by the other door of the cab; but it was already guarded by a robust fellow, no other than Pigache, rigged out like a cab-driver for the occasion.

"Shall I assist you to alight?" continued Piédouche amiably.

Flight was impossible, and at the end of that terrible passage dishonour awaited the prisoner. He realised it, and instead of accepting his companion's obliging invitation, he fumbled excitedly in his pocket.

"Do not trouble yourself," said the detective, who had guessed the young man's intention, "the revolver isn't there now. I took it from you between the Pont de Grenelle and the Pont d'Iéna. You see, I noticed you were disposed to commit some folly with that toy, so I had good reason for taking it from you. If I had left it in your pocket you would have been in 'kingdom come' half a minute ago, and I should be in a scrape."

"I have no longer even the means of killing myself," murmured Louis de Gentilly.

"Come, my dear sir, they are waiting for you," continued Piédouche, in his sweetest tone.

"Where are you taking me?"

"To my patron. He is a commissary of police—not of my district, it is true, but that makes no difference."

"You are then—"

"A detective officer, to serve you if it were in my power."

"Wretch!"

"You do wrong to abuse me, for I was most considerate with you. It only lay with me to arrest you in presence of your lady-love."

In saying this Piédouche boasted a bit, for, notwithstanding the presence of Pigache, whom he had taken with him as a reinforcement, he would have had no little trouble in forcibly removing M. de Gentilly from a house guarded by several servants. Besides, he had special reasons for resorting to a ruse. The capture of the assassin was to him what the victory of Austerlitz was to the first Napoleon, and he did not care to share either the glory or profit which might result therefrom. So it was his interest to avoid a disturbance, and bring the culprit to the Prefecture without other help than Pigache's. He had succeeded, and experienced intense delight.

Louis now decided to get out, and the police officers, whom Piédouche had not taken into his confidence, were somewhat astonished to see such a handsome, proud looking young man, turn between the two detectives into the passage which conducts to the Assizes, and New Caledonia or the guillotine. The unfortunate young man braced himself against the emotion which had at first overwhelmed him, and passed along with his head erect and a gleam of assurance in his eyes. Piédouche and Pigache walked be-

side him. The cab, which they had hired of a friend in the business, had been left in the charge of a Garde de Paris.

The buildings round about were of recent erection. It is well known that the old Prefecture of police was pulled down a few years ago. The filthy dingy Rue de Jerusalem no longer exists; the fearful hovels, which formerly contained the offices, have disappeared, and buildings of monumental aspect rise in their place.

The steps which lead to the office of the chief of the criminal investigation service are on the left hand at the end of a corridor, flanked on both sides by the offices of inspectors. "Show me the way," said M. de Gentilly, as he paused at the foot of the winding flight, the stone of which has not yet been worn by the constant tread of police agents and criminals.

"Pass on, young man," replied Piédouche; "it is on the first floor, straight before you."

Louis passed on. He now understood why his companions insisted on walking behind him. Detectives always do walk behind those they arrest, their object being to have them where they can watch them the best. Their politeness is nothing but prudence.

On the first floor, Louis found a large anteroom, occupied by a couple of clerks and a messenger, and scantily furnished with a stove, a table, and a few chairs in rather bad condition. Piédouche offered one of the seats to his prisoner, who sat down without uttering a word. He realised that it was useless to struggle, and only thought of preparing his defence.

Pigache did not venture to sit down, but stood on guard before the door opening on to the staircase, so as to prevent M. de Gentilly from trying to escape.

The employés were not at all disturbed by the advent of the party, but looked with perfect indifference at the seemingly respectable young man the officers had just brought in. They had seen many other young swells in a similar predicament. Piédouche asked them if the governor was alone, and on their answering affirmatively he glided into a second anteroom, separating the outer one from the chief's private office, partly opened the door, and, on a sign from the chief, entered with cautious steps.

"Nothing new?" asked his superior officer, who was turning over some papers.

"Excuse me, sir, there is a deal of news, on the contrary."

"Then speak quick, for I have no time to lose."

Piédouche thereupon produced the famous pocket-book, and laid it on his desk, exclaiming:

"There's something new; and something new of the first class, or I do not know myself."

"What is this?" asked the chief, as he opened the pocket-book. "Some bank-notes? Do you take my office for the depository of lost articles?"

"Go on, sir, please."

"Two names written on a card. 'M. de Gentilly, at Madame Lecomte's, Boulevard du Quatre Septembre, Boulogne.' I know a Gentilly, or one who is called so, but he is not mixed up in the affair of the Rue de l'Arbalète. He was not willing to deal with it. Explain yourself, instead of giving me conundrums to guess."

"Look at the photograph, sir—the portrait."

"Well! what about the portrait? Ah, the deuce! why, it is that of the murdered woman."

"Evidently, sir."

"And you found this pocket-book?"

"In the pocket of an Englishman, who was nabbed at the Morgue, at about three o'clock this afternoon."

"And you come to report this to me now?" exclaimed the chief, rising abruptly. "And you did not bring me the man without losing a moment?"

"He must be at the dépôt, sir."

"But he ought to be here, and I am going—"

"Excuse me, sir, but I do not think it would help you much to question him."

"Are you crazy, or are you trifling with me?"

"I'll tell you, sir. It was a pickpocket who stole this pocket-book from an individual, whom I had spotted at the Morgue—"

"And whom you allowed to escape? This time, my boy, the measure is full, and I declare to you that you no longer belong to the establishment."

"I let him escape, it's true, but I found him again; and it wasn't very difficult—for his name is there on that piece of paper."

"Then it is this M. de Gentilly?"

"Yes, patron. And he recognised the pocket-book as belonging to him—and cut up rough when I showed him the portrait—oh, but so rough!"

"At last, then, we have him; for I hope you set a watch on his door."

"Better than that, sir, I persuaded him to come and see you with me."

"What! he's here?"

"In your anteroom, sir; Pigache is taking care of him."

"This is superb, my boy. And you operated all alone?"

"All alone, sir. I had none of M. Tolbiac's help. In fact he doesn't know a word about the affair. I had no need of him."

"How did you manage it?"

"Oh, gently enough. I found the individual at this Madame Lecomte's. He is going to marry the daughter. They are all rich people. But to gain a hearing I said that I had found a pocket-book full of bank-notes, which I had brought back with me. An old trick of my invention; it always succeeds. And then I pretended that I was afraid of being compromised by the portrait. I declared I could return it to no one but the commissary. Gentilly acted surly for a long time, but he came at last all the same. His lady-love awaits him this evening. Poor little thing! She would do well to find another husband."

"It is surprising he consented to follow you, if he is guilty."

"If he is guilty, sir? Oh! on that point I'm positive. I recognised his beard, his eyebrows, his coat, his grey castor gloves, and his voice. It is, certainly, the rascal who played me the trick in the Rue de l'Arbalète."

"Then he ought to have recognised you too."

"Not a bit of it. On the night of the affair I was rigged out like a black-guard; but to-day I'm dressed like a decent citizen, and I gave myself another face."

"That's true. All goes well then! Go and bring him, Piédouche, and count on a handsome reward, old fellow. You have done a good day's work and I too."

XXXIII.

"A REWARD! I won't refuse it, sir," said Piédouche, "although, I must tell you, Tolbiac promised me one—and a fine one, too: a thousand franc-note."

"Very well, that will make two," replied the chief. "You have well earned them, far better than Tolbiac has gained what will be allowed him, for he has not done much in any way. If Father Lecoq had taken hold of the affair we shouldn't have had to depend on a chance like the one which enabled you to catch the assassin."

"That's true, sir. M. Lecoq is master of us all and, when a fellow has served under him, he would go through fire to please him, if need be."

"He will open his eyes wide when I go to-morrow and tell him of the capture. As for Tolbiac, he may yet be able to help us, for this Gentilly will defend himself, I'm sure, and must be prepared on all sides. The investigation will not be so easy. It would be well to find out something about the young man's mode of life. He is young, is he not?"

"Twenty-five to twenty-eight years old; not more."

"Good! He has money, that's evident by these bank-notes; he must have kept some stylish women and had several mistresses. Tolbiac is excellent for investigations in that class of society. We shall need him, unless I induce the young gentleman to confess. And after all it wouldn't be the first time I've obtained a confession at the first examination. All depends on the way it is managed. Now, then, we will see."

"Shall I stay in your office while you question him, sir?"

"No, it's useless; but keep yourself in the anteroom. I shall, perhaps, call you. And then we will search the prisoner's house this evening. I wish to push the investigation forward at once. I will take you and Pigache with me."

"All right, sir. But, first of all, I must tell you three things, which will guide you as to the individual. First of all, he offered me up to twenty thousand francs to return him the portrait. Next, when he saw I didn't take the bait, he put a revolver under my nose. I told him he would spoil his affair, and that calmed him. He must be foolish. He knows, however, that they won't guillotine him twice. Finally, on arriving here, when he saw I had brought him to the Prefecture of police without telling him, he fumbled in his pocket to get at his weapon, and wanted to blow his brains out—but it was no go; I had played the pickpocket while he looked out of the cab-window—and here is the very plaything," concluded Piédouche, laying the revolver on the desk.

"Come, now," said the chief, somewhat moved by the simplicity of this narrative, "you are a good fellow, and I will speak of you to the prefect." Then, returning to the story of the arrest, he put various questions to his subaltern, and received replies which made him completely acquainted with the accessory circumstances of the affair. He next bade him fetch the prisoner.

During the short interval which elapsed between Piédouche's exit and the prisoner's entry, the chief of the criminal investigation service prepared himself for the duel in which he was about to engage. For the first examination is a real duel—a duel in which all the advantage lies with the examiner. He can choose the mode of attack he pleases, while the person he examines cannot guess what thrust is to be made at him. The one is perfectly cool, and the other profoundly troubled; so that the combat is by no means equal. But there is more than one way of conducting it. The examiner may indulge in straight thrusts, intimidate his prisoner by rapid and unforeseen questions; or, on the contrary, use circumspection, gentleness, and patience, and enclose the enemy in a network of arguments furnished by his own answers, thus reducing him more slowly perhaps, but

certainly more surely, to the impossibility of denial. The chief, after reflection, decided on the latter course. However, he neglected none of the necessary precautions. He moved one of the lamps which lighted his desk, and so arranged the shade that the light fell upon the seat which was to be occupied by M. Gentilly. Then he laid the portrait under a paper weight, and placed the revolver in a drawer.

The door opened, and the young man advanced, conducted by Piédouche, who at once withdrew.

"Sit down, sir," said the chief of the criminal investigation service, politely.

M. de Gentilly bowed coldly, took his seat, and waited in silence to be questioned.

The questions were somewhat delayed. The chief looked at him, and experienced a strange feeling. He possessed an especial memory for faces, and it seemed to him that the prisoner's features were not unknown to him. He could not have retained such a clear recollection of the fleeting apparition he had seen by the doubtful light of a dying candle in the house of the Rue de l'Arbalète. No doubt M. de Gentilly had a very dark beard, like the individual who had come at midnight and called "Mary" in the cottage boudoir. But other points of comparison were needed in order to decide on the resemblance, and the chief had hardly seen anything more of that visitor than his beard. So he asked himself how it was that he seemed to recognise Louis de Gentilly for having met him on some previous occasion.

"You know why one of my officers has brought you here?" he asked at last.

"Ycs, sir," replied Louis, earnestly; "and I am surprised that an honourable man should be arrested on such vague evidence."

"It is certainly the same voice," thought the chief, recalling the house of the crime. And his second reflection was: "He assumes a high tone. He will plead mistaken identity. I must play cautiously." Thereupon he continued: "Permit me to tell you, sir, that in so serious an affair, it is my duty to neglect nothing. I add that you are not yet arrested. I had you brought before me to question you, and if you can satisfactorily explain to me your possession of the portrait found in your pocket-book, you will be perfectly free to go home again or to return and reassure the persons you have just left."

While uttering these reassuring words, the chief scrutinized the young culprit with a sharp eye, and saw that his face brightened up with joy. "I think, my lad," he thought, "that you did not expect to sleep in your bed to-night. That's an omen, and a good one. If you were innocent, it would seem quite natural to you."

"I thank you, sir, for looking at this affair in its true light," said M. de Gentilly, striving to appear calm.

"It is very simple. You know—at least by the newspapers—that up to the present we have not been able to arrive at the identity of the woman whose assassination excites all Paris at this moment. A portrait of this unfortunate creature has been found in your keeping. It is quite natural that you should be asked where and how you obtained it, and, if it was from herself, as I do not doubt, you will evidently be able to give me the information I require."

"You are mistaken, sir; I do not know her."

"Be careful! It is not likely you should have the portrait of a person you never saw in your pocket-book. Unless, indeed, this photograph was

given to you by one of your friends, in which case you can name that friend, who will give us the information."

"No one gave me the portrait."

"Then how does it happen—"

"Excuse me, sir. Your officer has, no doubt, told you how this pocket-book came into his hands?"

"Certainly. He found it on a pickpocket, who had just taken it from you—while you were looking at the exposed body."

"Very well, sir, it was no doubt the same thief who placed the portrait there; for, when I left home, I am perfectly sure the pocket-book only contained five thousand francs in bank-notes and a card, on which was written my name and that of Madame Lecomte."

The chief listened to this justification without saying a word. He thought to himself: "You are hurting yourself, my boy, and now I've got you." And he continued aloud: "You must admit, sir, that it is very unlikely this thief took the trouble to put the photograph into a pocket-book which it was to his interest to get rid of after abstracting the bank-notes. Pickpockets are not in the habit of carrying things which might convict them on their person. And then again, on reflection, I find your explanation altogether inadmissible. The Englishman was arrested just as he was coming out of the Morgue, and he made his stroke before the window. He certainly had not the time to manipulate the pocket-book, which he had indeed hastily hidden in a secret pocket of his trousers."

"You do not expect me, I suppose, to explain how he accomplished it," replied M. de Gentilly, drily. "I have not studied the ways of that class of people."

There was a moment's silence. The chief half closed his eyes, like a man collecting his thoughts, and his fingers played absent-mindedly with the photograph, which he had just taken from under the paper-weight. All at once he raised his head and asked, looking intently at the young man: "Do you understand English?"

XXXIV.

"YES, sir," replied M. de Gentilly, but not without a little hesitation. "I understand English. But why this question, if you please?"

"Because I would beg you to explain to me the meaning of three words which are written on the back of this card," said the chief. "See—read! There is: 'Forget me not!'"

While still talking, he showed the portrait to the young man, but without letting go of it, and perceived that his prisoner turned pale at the sight. "Come, sir," he continued, "the translation cannot be very difficult. I never studied English, yet it seems to me that I can guess the meaning. 'Forget me not'—that must mean—"

"*Ne m'oubliez pas*," stammered Thérèse's lover.

"That is just what I thought. And this sweet recommendation is signed with a charming little name—'Mary'—the name of the murdered woman, who is English, as we know."

"The pickpocket is also English," said Louis.

"That is true. Would you conclude from that that he was the woman's lover?"

"I don't conclude; I merely make a statement."

"So be it. But you will make no one believe that so charming and so

elegant a creature dedicated a love souvenir to a rascal of the worst kind, for this portrait is evidently a souvenir. It must have been given to the lover at the time of a separation, and this lover, who was no doubt about to start on a long journey, must have been a handsome, distinguished, wealthy young man, like yourself, sir."

"That is a mere conjecture, and I repeat that I have seen this portrait for the first time to-day, as well as the person it represents."

"Very well, that is your course. I think it is a bad one, but let me proceed. It was no doubt curiosity that attracted you to the Morgue?"

"Yes, sir. It is painful for me to admit it, for I have a horror of the repugnant sights which are seen there."

"In fact they are but little sought after in the class of society you belong to."

"I should never have entered that vile place, but the newspapers have said so much about this strange affair that I was seized with a desire to see the corpse."

"That was very natural. All Paris has had that desire. So you left home—"

"Yes, sir; and as I passed by the Morgue—"

"With five thousand francs in your pocket."

"I was on my way to carry the amount to a jeweller who had sold me a bracelet."

"Which you intended to offer to your betrothed. My officer told me that. This jeweller no doubt lives at the Palais Royal."

"No; in the Rue de la Paix."

"And you, sir, where do you live?"

The young man started, and replied with considerable embarrassment: "In the Rue du Mont-Thabor."

"The Morgue is not on your way," said the chief, gently. "But the queen of spades woman was worth going out of one's way to see. So you passed in front of the Morgue and followed the crowd—"

"Yes, sir—and I have very much regretted giving way to a foolish fancy. That body—is horrible! I hardly had the courage to look at it—"

"That was no doubt the reason why you held your handkerchief to your eyes."

"Who told you that?"

"Oh, I know a great many things—professionally. I can understand that you were moved. And, besides, the loss of your pocket-book must have affected you painfully. When did you perceive it's loss?"

"On reaching home."

"On changing your clothes, was it not?"

"Yes, sir; I was going to dine at Boulogne, at the house of Madame Lecomte."

"Whose son-in-law you will soon be. You could not, of course, present yourself at her house in the same clothes you wore at the Morgue. You had a short tweed coat, a woollen comforter, and a soft felt hat. A singular style of dress for a young man who prides himself on his elegance and distinction."

"I did not wish to show myself in such a place fashionably dressed," stammered M. de Gentilly, who commenced to lose countenance. "I put on some old clothes expressly—"

"You told me just now that you were on your way to your jeweller's. It would seem that you did not care to inspire him with confidence," said

the chief, coldly. "It is true that you were going to pay cash, and that he, no doubt, knew you."

M. de Gentilly did not reply to these ironical observations, the object of which he too well understood. He felt that he had contradicted himself, and the self-possession he had given proof of at the commencement of his examination, deserted him.

He was just as his adversary wished him to be. "Look here, sir," said the functionary. "I think you are taking a wrong course, and it is my duty to warn you of it. You wear yourself out in useless efforts to deny what is evident. This portrait belongs to you, I can doubt it no longer, after the contradictions and improbabilities you have fallen into. Let me tell you that you are acting wrongly—just like the people who are careful not to recognise the body of one of their friends at the Morgue, for fear of compromising themselves. However, I understand your scruples, to a certain point. You occupy an excellent position, you are going to be married, and it displeases you to be mixed up in a criminal affair. That is why you invent absurd evasions instead of frankly admitting that you formerly had relations with the lady of the Rue de l'Arbalète. How is it that you can't understand that the possession of her portrait is not a crime, that it can be explained in the most natural way? I add that it is the duty of all honest men to assist justice, and that you will commit a bad action in hiding what you know from us. Come, sir, do not persist in disguising the truth. It will cost you dear if you continue in this deplorable course, and—excuse me for mentioning a name here which is dear to you—if Mademoiselle Lecomte, your betrothed, were present at this examination, I am sure she would beg of you to speak."

M. de Gentilly, visibly affected, but trying to control himself, looked down and made no reply. "Think that she anxiously awaits you, and that, on an acceptable explanation from you, I will give you your liberty—this evening—at once; whereas, if you continue to deny everything, I shall be obliged to consider you guilty, and to send you where we send the men who are suspected of murder."

The young man became horribly pale and his features worked nervously; but at last his lips parted, and, with tolerable firmness, he said:

"I have nothing more to reply to you. I am innocent. Do as you please with me."

The chief of the criminal investigation service had not anticipated this stubborn resistance, but he construed it as another proof of the guilt of M. de Gentilly; and, despairing of bringing him to a confession, he at once changed his manner and language. "What is your name?" he asked drily. "Where do you live? What is your profession?"

"My name is Louis de Gentilly. I live at No. 72 Rue du Mont-Thabor. I am a doctor of laws and chief clerk to M. Laboureaux, notary."

"Are you wealthy?"

"My father is."

"What does your father do?"

"He lives on his means."

"You do not live with him?"

"No."

The chief put all these questions in an absent-minded manner and listened to the answers in a formal way, then, after taking, or pretending to take, some notes, he suddenly asked, looking the accused full in the face: "Do you know M. Lheureux?"

Instead of starting at this name, which was that of the merchant murdered in the Rue de l'Arbalète, M. de Gentilly replied, "Not at all," without showing any emotion.

"He didn't trip: that's strange," thought the chief. And, changing his batteries at once, he continued: "What did you do on Saturday evening, the 13th of January?"

And he waited, expecting that the accused would fall into the trap; for guilty prisoners always have a story prepared for use when they are asked to account for the way they employed the day of the crime.

But Louis de Gentilly calmly replied: "I cannot tell you exactly. That evening has left no particular recollections on my mind. I must have spent it like all the others, at Madame Lecomte's at Boulogne."

"And Sunday evening, the 14th?"

"I passed it in the same way. Only, my father must have dined with me at Madame Lecomte's, as he always does on Sundays."

"These allegations will be verified," said the chief, coldly. "For the present, I have nothing more to ask of you."

"Then I can withdraw?" asked the young man, anxiously.

The chief shrugged his shoulders, rang his bell, and said to Piédouche, who entered: "A cab! at once!"

XXXV.

"The cab which brought us here is still in the yard," replied Piédouche. "I borrowed it from a party who knows me. Pigache drives. He understands it, as he served in the artillery train."

"Good! So go and wait for me down-stairs, at the end of the passage," said the chief.

The detective instantly disappeared. "Where are you going, sir?" asked Louis de Gentilly, in a choked voice.

"To your residence."

"To my residence! what does that mean?"

"That means that I am going to make an official visit to your rooms, and, as I desire to make this visit in your presence, I am obliged to take you with me. Oh, do not be uneasy. All will pass off in such a way that you will not be compromised in the least, in case you should succeed in exonerating yourself from the grave accusation suspended over you. You have just heard me give to that officer an order to precede me. We are about to go out together—as though you were a complainant instead of a prisoner under suspicion. And when we enter your residence, I shall so arrange matters that your concierge will mistrust nothing."

"I am greatly obliged to you for these precautions," said the young man bitterly, "but they seem to me altogether superfluous, if, as I suppose, you take the liberty of searching my rooms and examining my papers."

"That is indispensable."

"And especially if you arrest me afterwards."

"If I arrest you, it will be because you compel me to do so. There is yet time to avoid the adoption of harsh measures. Exonerate yourself. Prove your innocence to me. I am ready to listen, and as soon as I shall have verified the truth of your declarations, I will give you your liberty."

"Prove my innocence! But it is for you to prove that I am guilty."

"Nothing could be more correct, and it is precisely in view of proving your guilt that I am going to visit your residence. So, come along, sir."

After this logical conclusion the chief put the photograph in his pocket—he had previously locked the bank-notes in a drawer with the revolver—motioned M. de Gentilly to the door, and went out behind him.

The employes looked at them as they passed, with the indifference of men who are accustomed to see people of fashionable society take the same road as professional villains. One of them had been at the Prefecture ever since the days of Caussidière. The inspectors, who are on the ground floor, did not disturb themselves, neither did the police officers show any signs of commotion. A passer-by, a stranger to the ways of the "establishment," might have thought that M. de Gentilly and the person who accompanied him were about to take a ride for pleasure.

Pigache was already on the box, and Piédouche stood by the door of the vehicle. Thérèse's lover took a back seat, the chief sitting beside him, while Piédouche, having given the address to the temporary coachman, installed himself opposite his superior.

They started, and the journey was not a long one, for the horse was a fast trotter and had had time to rest. Leaning back in a corner of the vehicle, M. de Gentilly did not open his lips during the short drive. Was he preparing his mode of defence? or did he think of his betrothed, who awaited him? Whatever may have occupied his mind, the chief made no attempt to trouble his meditations, and they reached the Rue du Mont-Thabor without having exchanged a word.

Louis lived on the first floor of a handsome house, in a tastefully furnished and conveniently arranged apartment. There were four rooms—a sitting-room, study, bedroom, and dressing-room—all of them opening into a wide corridor. As the young man did not take his meals at home, he had no need of a dining-room, and he had dispensed with the luxury of a valet. In the absence of the woman who kept things tidy for him, he himself opened the door for the two visitors whose presence he would so gladly have dispensed with.

On the way upstairs he had taken a light from the concierge, who did not evince the slightest astonishment at seeing the most generous of his tenants come home in the company of two gentlemen.

"Now do what you please," he said to the officers as he opened his study.

The chief glanced quickly at the book-case, in which some voluminous legal works were ranged side by side, with less serious and more elegantly bound books. He remarked some old engravings and two or three modern pictures of some value, on the walls; and noted several bundles of papers, some of which seemed to have been recently examined, on the writing-table. The room was that of a sedate young man whose professional work did not prevent him from taking an interest in Art and Literature. The chief thus looked upon it, and it was only as a matter of form that he turned over the papers spread out upon the desk and opened the drawers, in which he only found some insignificant papers.

M. de Gentilly waited in a somewhat haughty attitude, until they had finished their search, and then conducted them into the sitting-room. Here there was little to be seen save some divans, Turkish pipes, and trophies of arms. Not a piece of furniture that locked with a key, and no tables, only some painted stands bearing boxes of tobacco and microscopic coffee-cups. The young man had installed himself in Oriental style.

Piédouche, amazed at these novelties, walked on tiptoe to avoid soiling

the Smyrna carpet. His chief decided at the first glance that it was useless to search this apartment, and so he passed into the bedroom, where his eyes fell at once, not upon the four-post bedstead, which was, however, a handsome one of Louis XIV. style, but upon a little rosewood secretaire ensconced in a corner. "Will you please give me the key to that piece of furniture?" he asked unhesitatingly, for he guessed that the young man's secrets were locked up in it.

"Here it is, sir," said M. de Gentilly, coldly. "Inspect that secretaire I can't prevent you; but I tell you beforehand that it only contains family papers and private letters. When you have found that they have nothing to do with the affair which brings you here, you will, I suppose, return them to me."

"They will be placed with the other papers in your case. The necessities of the examination require it," said the chief; "but they may be returned to you later. Besides, I cannot examine them now. Let us go on, if you please."

The dressing-room was only separated from the bedroom by curtains. Piédouche raised them to let his chief pass, and held out at arm's length a lamp with two burners, which he had taken from the study table. "This is your entire apartment?" asked the chief, after glancing at the white marble wash-stand, with its faience basins and jugs, its cut-glass toilet bottles, ivory-backed flesh-brushes, and the thousand other accessories necessary to a fashionable man.

"Absolutely everything," replied M. de Gentilly, drily, "unless you wish to inspect the kitchen, the store place for wood, the cupboard in which I hang my clothes—"

"That will do, sir. My mission here is ended. I shall now in your presence take and seal your papers, correspondence, and—"

The chief stopped short on feeling Piédouche's hand placed gently on his arm. He turned round and glanced at his subordinate, who said nothing, but assumed a very expressive look. His grey eyes indicated a space of wall, which was covered with hangings, between the toilet-table and the window. Between members of the profession, this mute language is greatly used, and is very intelligible. And the chief at once responded with a wink which signified: "Go and see."

M. de Gentilly, pale but still master of himself, witnessed this strange exchange of glances without understanding their meaning. But he learnt it only too soon. Piédouche, who was a methodical man, commenced by lighting the four candles of the toilet-glass. He was particularly anxious that the room should be well lighted, for he should himself need the lamp he carried in his hand.

"Will you please to enter?" said the chief, standing aside to let M. de Gentilly pass into the dressing-room. The outer door of the apartment was not locked, and the young man might be tempted to escape. However, he did not seem anxious to do so, though this invitation troubled him visibly. "It is useless. My dressing-case has no secret drawers," he said, affecting a jocular tone. Nevertheless, he decided to advance, and the chief was careful to take up his position immediately behind him.

Piédouche was already at work. Having discovered a brass knob, which was pretty well concealed by the tapestry, he pressed it, and in doing so started a movable panel. "A hiding-place," he exclaimed. "What can he have in here? May be a third corpse," he added to himself.

XXXVI.

"WHAT is the matter with you, sir?" asked the chief of the criminal investigation service, looking fixedly at M. de Gentilly.

Thérèse's lover made an effort to reply, but his voice died away in his throat. In the meanwhile, Piédonche popped his head and arm into the hiding-place which the displacement of the panel had revealed to him, and examined it inquisitively by the light of the lamp he carried. "It's funny—very funny," he said, drawing back.

One could tell by his face that he had seen something very strange and unexpected—something which he could not very well explain to himself. His chief took the lamp from him, made him a sign to look after the prisoner, and drew near to find out what could have so surprised an old officer accustomed to the strangest discoveries. The secret door opened into a sort of recess, formed by a space purposely left between the partition hung with drapery and the main wall of the house. This recess, much longer than it was wide, and from which daylight was completely excluded, was embellished with old Flemish tapestry, the floor being covered with a fine strong matting, such as is so commonly used in tropical countries. There was only one piece of furniture, but it was well worth the trouble of a close inspection. It was a square Chinese lacquered table, and upon it a pack of cards was spread, arranged in a particular manner, the red kings being laid with the black queens, the black aces next to the red knaves, and so on. This discovery, made anywhere else, would certainly not have compromised the occupant of the apartment. There is nothing criminal in shutting one's self up to play a game of patience; neither is it forbidden to leave the game with the cards still spread out upon the table; but the chief distinctly recalled the card-table in the boudoir, where he had passed some disagreeable hours in a clock-case; and then, again, he had in his pocket the portrait of the murdered woman, photographed with a queen of spades in one hand and a camellia in the other. The flower and the card were at the Morgue on her body. And on the table in this hiding-place, beside the cards symmetrically arranged, there was a faded flower, a flower which could still be recognised by its form—it was a camellia!

These strange coincidences sufficiently accused M. de Gentilly, and, indeed, in the course of his long career the functionary had never made so providential a discovery. He even asked himself how this unfortunate young man could have been so imprudent as to preserve this terrible testimony against himself, like a work of Art preserved in a museum. The secret recess had almost the appearance of an oratory; and on noting the pious care with which M. Lecoq's son had thus arranged it, one would have been tempted to believe that he sometimes came and knelt before these relics of departed happiness.

"It is unheard of," said the chief to himself. "He must have adored this woman—the cards, the flower—all this was undoubtedly connected with the remembrance of some love scene, and yet he killed her—for it is as clear as daylight that he did so—yes, killed her intentionally, just as she was engaged in a game of patience—and as she is seen in her portrait. Is this man crazy? I know nothing about it, but I would bet a good deal that his lawyer will plead insanity, and I myself, if I were on the jury, should perhaps believe it. Yes, but I am not a jurymen, and, after due

reflection, I think that M. de Gentilly is neither more nor less than a sentimental assassin. I have already seen more than one of the kind, and, with a little imagination, one can picture to one's self all the scenes, of which I find the traces. For instance, the lady had a passion for consulting cards to find out whether she would marry her lover. I suppose Gentilly must have known her in England, and that some fine morning he was recalled to France. On that day she no doubt tried her future with a successful issue. The lovers then vowed to preserve the cards which had predicted their future happiness. There they lie on that table; I am astonished that he did not cover them with a glass case. Later on, however, she came to Paris, and to refresh the young man's memory, she had her portrait taken with the various accessories which were to recall their tender farewell. She then wrote on the back of the card: 'Forget me not,' and sent it to him. That must be it. Before going to Boulogne, Piédouche went to see the photographer, who told him that the lady came alone, that she ordered only one copy, and exacted that the negative should be destroyed. My romance is now three-quarters completed; yes, but the finish? Well, it is not so difficult to arrive at. Gentilly, after seeing the woman again, learns that she plays him false. He wants to revenge himself. He prepares everything in advance. He happens to call on her one evening, finds his rival seated at the table, and kills him. He passes into the boudoir, where he surprises his lady-love engaged in trying her luck at patience—for another. He strikes her with his poniard, and fastens upon her heart the queen of spades, a card which had a peculiar significance for them in the days of their early love, as it represented their happiness—"

And, suddenly struck with a new idea, the officer quickly leaned forward over the table and began to examine the cards arranged on it. The queen of spades was missing. According to the rules of the game of patience—which the chief was fully acquainted with—the queen of spades ought to have been married to the king of hearts. Now the king of hearts was a widower.

This was quite enough, so the chief returned to the dressing-room, closed the movable panel again, handed the lamp to Piédouche, and simply said: "I have seen all I wish to see. Let us go."

"And from what you have seen, sir," exclaimed Louis de Gentilly, "I hope you are not going to conclude that I am guilty—I hope you will not attach importance to so-called evidence, which no one would think of seriously?"

"The time has not yet come to discuss its value. The examining magistrate is the person to judge of that," replied the chief.

"And so you assume the responsibility of arresting me, and of dishonouring me; for in my position an arrest, even if I were released to-morrow, means dishonour, and you have no other evidence against me than the possession of a portrait, and I know not what inference you please to draw from—"

"Enough," said the chief sternly. "You forget that you offered twenty thousand francs to the officer who brought you to the Prefecture to allow you to escape. You also forget that you subsequently wished to kill him and commit suicide. An innocent man does not act like that I think."

"I had lost my head—I—"

"Spare yourself useless words. For the last two hours you have been under arrest. I did not tell you so, because I hoped that you would make

some confession. Now, I have nothing more to ask of you. You belong to justice. Let us go."

M. de Gentilly received this terrible blow with considerable firmness. He passed without a word into the bedroom again, and looked on unconcernedly while the chief opened the secretaire, took some bundles of letters from it, and made a package of them, which he sealed with wax.

"Where are you going to send me?" asked the young man, coldly, when this was done.

"To the dépôt of the Prefecture. To-morrow you will be questioned by the examining magistrate, and after the examination you will probably be transferred to Mazas."

"Can I inform any one that I have been arrested?"

"If you refer to the persons with whom you spent the evening, I cannot take upon myself to give you permission to write to them."

"I do not refer to them. I should like my father to be informed of what has happened to me."

"I will have him informed in the morning. Tell me where he lives."

"No. 49, Quai Conti."

"No. 49, Quai Conti!" repeated the chief of the investigation service, with signs of evident astonishment. "And his name is M. de Gentilly?"

"Lecoq de Gentilly."

At this reply it was not only the chief who displayed astonishment, but Piédouche who gave a start and appeared altogether discomfited.

"What! You are the son of M. Lecoq, the former merchant?" continued the chief. "Of M. Lecoq de Gentilly, who has lived for the last ten years in the house you have mentioned?"

"Yes, sir."

"Your father is a man who is justly esteemed," continued the chief after a moment's silence, "and I promise you to go myself to-morrow, as early as possible, and tell him of what has taken place. It is, unfortunately, all I can do for you," he added, showing the prisoner to the door.

Louis Lecoq passed out first, and on the stairs the chief, sincerely affected, whispered in Piédouche's ear: "This is a fatality. Poor Father Lecoq! He'll die of sorrow. And I who proposed he should take charge of the affair—when I met him with his son, on the Pont-Neuf the day the mute was let out. When he entered my office, that scamp of a son, I said to myself, 'Where have I seen that face before?' And when I heard his name, De Gentilly, it ought to have put me on the track; but I was so far from thinking that he was related to our good friend Lecoq. Zounds! here's a discovery which spoils all my joy!"

"And I, patron, I'm not rich; but when I think I shall be the cause of M. Lecoq ending his life in sorrow, I would willingly give reward, promotion and all, not to have gone to the Morgue to-day."

"It can't be helped, it's our business. To-morrow, perhaps, I shall have to confront the mute with this boy here, and it is pretty certain that the confrontation will send my old friend's son to the guillotine."

XXXVII.

THE day had just dawned, a beautiful winter morning, such as Providence sometimes vouchsafes to the Parisians in the middle of January. On such days the streets have a festive aspect. The poor devils whose business

obliges them to run about the city rejoice at breathing in a balmy atmosphere, and at not having to splash through the mud. The rich, leaving their chimney-corners, walk towards the Champs-Élysées to see if spring is coming, and more than all, to gain an appetite. Fashionable women trip here and there, with their high heels going pit-a-pat over the dry side walks, and loiter before the shop-windows. There is joy in the air on such days as these ; and of this joy Father Lecoq had his good share. He had risen, as was his custom, with dawn, and had just shaved, having made his toilet, which always took him a good hour, for he was very careful of his person. He opened his window and for the thousandth time gazed upon the marvellous panorama seen from the Quai Conti. In front, the Seine, animated by passing boats, and the Louvre flooded with light. To the left, the tall chestnut trees on the Tuileries terrace nigh the water, which sparkled under the rays of the sun, just returning from its six months' sojourn in the South. To the right, the island of La Cité, rejuvenated by modern architects and with the tapering gilded steeple of the Sainte Chapelle rising arrow-like to the sky, while the twin towers of Notre Dame, peered above the roof of the Prefecture of police.

One side of the picture with its varied aspect reminded M. Lecoq of the past ; a laborious, stormy, undulating past. The other spoke to him of the future ; a future without clouds, the future of a man who has reached his goal, of a toiler who has conquered his place in the world ; who has assured himself an old age of comfort and honour ; who meditates and takes his ease, and fully expects to live again in his children.

During the past year everything had prospered with M. Lecoq. The disquietude formerly caused him by his son had been dispelled, and Louis' approaching marriage fulfilled all his desires. Louis was about to marry a young girl who was rich and charming, a young girl who loved him passionately. Lecoq knew his son thoroughly, and rejoiced that he had been so lucky ; for he was aware that this singular boy would not have sacrificed love for money, and that he was quite incapable of misplacing his affections. M. Lecoq still remembered Louis' escapades in England and in Germany, but he did not fear a recurrence of them in France. The young fellow's heart was caught, the wedding-day was fixed, and the presents were being purchased.

They cost the good man pretty dear, these presents. Only the day before he had given five thousand francs to pay for a bracelet, and he had not yet reached the end of the list. However, he did not regret this money, and had never felt happier than on this morning as he leaned over his balcony. He was thinking of going and surprising his son in bed, and of proposing they should go and visit some tradesmen together. Louis had been free for several days past. He had taken a holiday from his office, and he was not quite sure whether he would ever return to it, for the wedding tour had been determined upon, and Mademoiselle Lecomte did not show much taste for the profession of a notary. Father Lecoq had asked himself if his heir, instead of consecrating himself to contracts and a white cravat forever, would not do better to purchase a large estate in the country and devote himself to its improvement.

As far as the old "*tracker*" himself was concerned, he asked no better than to finish his days in the country ; he was quite willing to shake from his shoes the dust of this perverse city, the streets of which he had so often paced while hunting for men.

"And to think they fancied at the 'establishment' that I would return

to harness just to please them," he muttered, as he glanced disdainfully at the building of the Prefecture of police, bordering the Quai des Orfèvres. It is plain they know nothing about the pleasures of paternity—or anything. What! I, who am about to marry Louis, and become a castellan if I like, to mix myself up in those affairs? Ah! no, that time is past—the time when they called me Father Bring-to-light, and when I didn't usurp the name; but now the profession has no charms for me. I'm not like the sergeant in Beranger's song. The old steed no longer feels the spur. Rascals may assassinate women as much as they please, and even stick playing-cards on their hearts; at all events, I sha'n't run after them."

Father Lecoq boasted a little, perhaps, in affirming that judicial problems no longer had any interest for him, for a moment later he continued, speaking to himself: "It is nevertheless interesting, this affair. If I were still young, and had not Louis to see after, it would have excited me. There is that devil of a mute—it is he who knows the truth, but he cannot tell it—and for a good reason. What have they done at the 'establishment?' Only nonsense, so far. The chief, whom I met yesterday at the Tuileries, admitted to me that they were not much farther advanced than on the first day. They complain of Tolbiae, who goes to sleep over his work. I'm sorry I recommended him, that Tolbiac. He is a vain fellow, who makes more noise than he does work. And then, I don't think him very safe. He plots in affairs outside of the 'establishment.' That may be all right in England, but it works badly in France. Fortunately, they have associated Piédouche with him. He's honest; he has a good eye, and even keen judgment, though perhaps he is too liable to get himself into trouble."

M. Lecoq had reached this point in his reflections, and was about to leave the window, when a well-appointed brougham stopped before the door below. At this early hour, a private carriage is almost an event on the Quai Conti, and from habit the retired detective liked to know everything. So he leaned over to see who came in such a fine equipage to visit one of the tenants of a house which was mainly occupied by people of modest means, and he perceived two ladies alight and hurriedly enter the house. "It's strange," muttered the good man; "I could almost swear it was Madame Lecomte and her daughter; but I am evidently mistaken—they would have had to get up before daylight to reach here at eight o'clock in the morning. Nevertheless, that brougham is certainly theirs—now, I recognise the coachman. Oh, oh!" he added, closing the window; "is there going to be some trouble? Can Madame Lecomte have come to take back her word? But no, that is impossible—for in such a case she would not have brought Thérèse with her."

At this moment the bell rang, and in his haste to know what the ladies wished, M. Lecoq went to open the door for them himself. He found himself in the presence of the mother and daughter, both of whom met him with the words: "Louis is here, is he not, sir?"

"Louis! Why, no, mesdames. I haven't seen him since yesterday morning. Please to come in, ladies."

"You haven't seen him?" repeated Thérèse. "Ah! now I have only to die!"

"Die! What do you mean? What is the matter, mademoiselle, in Heaven's name? You frighten me."

"Ah, sir," said Madame Lecomte, entering in her turn, "if we come at such an hour, you can believe that serious motives—"

"Come in, ladies, I beg of you," said Father Lecoq, closing the door and pushing the visitors gently into a small sitting-room where a fire was already lighted. But they did not take time to seat themselves. "Monsieur," commenced the widow, "this is what has happened. Your son came as usual to dine with us yesterday at Boulogne. In the evening, about nine o'clock, I think, a stranger asked to speak to him—he insisted on being received, saying that he brought a pocket-book which had been lost by M. de Gentilly. I gave orders for him to be shown in—and he, in fact, showed the pocket-book, which contained five thousand francs—"

"Which I gave to Louis in the morning to pay to the jeweller. My son is a giddy goose to lose his bank-notes like this, and he didn't deserve to find an honest man to return them to him; but if that was the misfortune in question, it is already retrieved and—"

"Alas! sir, I would have given ten times the amount to have spared my daughter the scene which followed. This pocket-book also contained a portrait—the portrait of that unfortunate woman who was murdered—Rue de l'Arbalète, I think—"

"What! but Louis did not know her—it is impossible."

"He did not deny that he knew her," murmured Thérèse, who was weeping bitterly.

"To be brief, sir," continued the widow, who was almost as much moved as the poor girl, "the man who brought back the pocket-book said he could not return it until he had shown the portrait to the commissary of police, and he begged M. de Gentilly to accompany him."

"And my son was foolish enough to consent?" cried M. Lecoq, frowning. "Really, this is incredible. What did he look like, the fellow who presented himself under this pretext—for it was a pretext, you need not doubt."

"He was poorly dressed—a poor man."

"Yes, that's the way of it. Continue, madame, I beg of you. So Louis went away with him?"

"Yes. He promised to come back in the evening to reassure us, and we waited for him all night, but we have not seen him since. Judge of our disquietude and—"

At this moment M. Lecoq's housekeeper abruptly entered the room, and whispered something in his ear. "Excuse me, ladies," he said, rising, "I am informed of a visit which is perhaps connected with my son's inexplicable absence. I will go and see, and in a few moments I hope to be able to inform you that your alarm is uncalled for."

On this assurance, which contrasted with his agitated manner, M. Lecoq left the room to repair to his study, where another visitor awaited him.

XXXVIII.

It was the chief of the criminal investigation service who was waiting for the ex-detective. The functionary knew how to announce his presence outside his ex-colleague's abode, and instead of ringing the bell, he had discreetly pressed the electric knob, thus warning M. Lecoq's faithful housekeeper, Gertrude. The chief was sad and embarrassed, for he felt sincere friendship for M. Lecoq, and the communication he came to make was a most painful one. He was striding up and down, seeking for an expedient by which he might gently break the terrible news to the unfortunate father, when the worthy old man entered the room, and without the

least preamble exclaimed: "It is true, then, that my son has been arrested?"

"You know of it!" exclaimed the chief. "So much the better, my dear friend, for I felt greatly worried at having to announce it to you. I really did not know how to commence."

"I know that he has been arrested. Madame Lecomte, whose daughter he is about to marry, hastened here on purpose to tell me."

"In fact, it was at her house that—"

"But I don't know why."

The chief's countenance saddened. He had hoped, for a moment, that the worst was over, but he still found himself face to face with the necessity of striking the blow at his comrade; and what a blow it was!

"Madame Lecomte," continued Lecoq, "has just told me some story about a portrait, to which I, of course, attach no importance. Louis cannot in any way be mixed up in the affair you asked me to investigate. But by the description of the man who fetched him, and the means he employed to induce him to follow him, I knew at once that the fellow must have been one of your officers. Besides, you have just told me yourself that my son was arrested. So don't keep me in suspense, I beg of you. I am greatly tormented, as you see, although I feel certain that the whole matter is a mere peccadillo. But I am a father; and in this boy's position—he marries in two weeks' time—the least scandal would do him a great deal of harm. Now then, what is the trouble?"

The chief looked at the floor, and seemed in no hurry to reply.

"A woman scrape, isn't it?" continued the old man. "It surprises me; for, since his return to France, Louis has been of exemplary sedateness, and, besides, he is very much smitten with Mademoiselle Lecomte. But, after all, he is young, and it is not so very serious. The only thing is to avoid a scandal; and I will admit that I rely on you to help me to smother the whole affair. I am all the more anxious about this as the young lady is very jealous."

There was another pause.

"You say nothing; do I deceive myself?" exclaimed the poor father sorrowfully. "Can Louis be accused of something dishonourable? of having—oh, no, that's impossible; Louis is too proud to stoop to embezzlement. He has often had large amounts intrusted to him; and, besides, I am rich, and I have always given him more money than he cared for."

"Money has nothing to do with this sad affair, at least I think not," muttered the chief.

"Speak then. Don't you see that I'm dying by inches?"

"Well, have courage, my old friend. What I have to tell you will break your heart; but still it is best that I should be the one to inform you of it. Your son is accused of being the perpetrator of those crimes in the Rue de l'Arbalète."

On hearing this astounding declaration, M. Lecoq drew back like a man who has received a mortal blow, and stammered in a weak voice: "My son—the crimes of the Rue de l'Arbalète! Am I becoming insane, or are you telling me this to try me? No, it would be too cruel."

"I tell you the truth, alas! and if I caused your son's arrest, it was because I was obliged to do so. You yourself, in my place, would have acted as I have done."

"You have proofs then?"

"More than are necessary to relieve me of all doubts. Your son went to

the Morgue disguised. He was robbed there by an English pickpocket. The thief was caught a moment later, and the detectives on searching him found a pocket-book containing the portrait of the murdered woman, the name of M. de Gentilly, and the name and address of Madame Lecomte. You can guess what followed. Our officer went to Boulogne and brought me back the young man, whom I immediately questioned. I did not yet know that he was your son. I had forgotten the name of Gentilly."

"And he confessed?" asked M. Lecoq, in a tone of anguish.

"No. On the contrary, he denied everything, even to the evidence. He pretended he had never known this woman; but this morning I recognised his writing on an envelope which we found in the cottage in the Rue de l'Arbalète."

"At the most, that is only presumptive evidence."

"I have discovered more on inspecting the apartment he occupies in the Rue du Mont-Thabor. But it is very painful to me to enter into these details with you. Let it suffice for you to know that, while being brought to the Prefecture in a cab, your son attempted, in the first place, to corrupt the officer, afterwards to kill him, and finally wished to blow his own brains out."

"The unfortunate child no longer knew what he was about. He saw himself dishonoured—he thought of the distress of his betrothed, whom he adores, and lost his head, for the very reason that he is innocent. I affirm it, and I will prove it."

"I wish it were so with all my heart, my friend; but I cannot say that I believe it, for I am convinced that it was he who came to the cottage the night after the crime. Piédouche, who talked with him on that night, and who let him escape, recognised him perfectly last evening."

"What! Piédouche, who served so long under me, who owes so much to me, was it he who arrested Louis?"

"Why, yes. He was obliged to do his duty; besides, he did not know the man he arrested, and if he had been aware he was your son, he would, perhaps, not have had the courage to bring him to the Prefecture. Since he knows it, he is dismayed."

"I will see him and talk with him—he will help me in my investigation, for I don't give up the hope of proving Louis' innocence. The examination is not finished?"

"It has hardly commenced, as you can well believe. Your son entered the prison yesterday evening at eleven o'clock, and this morning he has not been questioned, for the magistrate charged with the investigation has not yet reached the Palais de Justice; however, I presume he will push the affair. The prefect and the public prosecutor were notified at midnight."

"And this evening all Paris will know that my son is an assassin," said the old man sadly. "And in a few moments the unfortunate young girl, who is here with her mother, will learn that her betrothed will end at New Caledonia, or on the scaffold—for they will condemn him, I feel it—appearances are against him—public opinion is greatly excited—he won't know how to defend himself—and yet he is not guilty, I swear it."

M. Lecoq wept, and his grief greatly affected the chief, who affectionately pressed his hand and said: "My dear friend, don't despair. You know, better than I, that the most entangled affairs sometimes completely change in aspect during an investigation. Your son, on explaining himself frankly will perhaps succeed in proving that he was only indirectly mixed up in the crime, involuntarily even. Facts may be discovered in his favour. If he

proved an *alibi*—if the mute did not recognise him when they were confronted—”

“That’s true,” exclaimed the old man, raising his head ; “there is that mute. He alone can throw light on this abominable mystery ; he alone can positively identify the assassin, and he does not know my son, I’ll answer for that. Where could he have seen him ? This man doesn’t belong to Paris, you know that from the experiment I recommended to you, and Louis has lived in Paris for several years. Let them try the experiment ; it will be decisive.”

“They will try it, don’t doubt it, my dear Lecoq ; and I greatly hope that it will not turn against the party under suspicion.”

“I don’t fear it,” said M. Lecoq, in a firm voice. “Shall I be allowed to see my son ?”

“Yes ; I have obtained this favour for you, as you have rendered us such exceptional services, but it was not without trouble. Only you will not see him without witnesses until further orders. I shall be present at your interviews if you wish it ; the first can take place this morning.”

“I thank you, my old friend. In an hour from now I will present myself at your office. One word more. Was Tolbiac mixed up in this arrest ?”

“In no way whatever. In fact, he has done very little in the affair, and we are somewhat dissatisfied with him. Nevertheless, it is not probable he will be dismissed, for the mystery is far from being cleared up, and we have no one to replace him.”

“That’s all I wanted to know,” said M. Lecoq, and he conducted the chief towards the door.

Once alone, the old man, driving back his tears and composing his face, returned to the sitting-room, where Madame Lecomte and her daughter were awaiting him in cruel anguish.

“Compose yourselves,” he said to them gaily ; “Louis is the victim of a misapprehension. He referred the authorities to me, and as I am honourably known, one of the superior officers from the Prefecture of police has taken the trouble to come himself to tell me of the matter. I am going at once to the Prefecture, and I shall undoubtedly soon bring Louis to see you—perhaps this very evening.”

Thérèse threw her arms around M. Lecoq’s neck, and whispered in his ear : “Tell him that I forgive him the sorrow he has caused me—that I forgive him, but on condition, that he never any more carries another portrait than mine about him.”

Madame Lecomte, on her side, wept for joy.

The old man firmly believed in his son’s innocence ; but, in point of fact, he was not as composed as he tried to appear, for he could not hide from himself that his son’s head was at stake in the fearful struggle he was about to engage in against the hostility of detectives and the prejudices of magistrates.

XXXIX.

GREAT sorrows are mute. Having seen Madame and Mademoiselle Lecomte to the door, Father Lecoq did not give way to lamentations, nor shed a tear. In presence of the chief of the criminal investigation service he had controlled himself, as he did not wish to appear to look seriously upon the charge brought against Louis. Before the ladies he had also controlled himself—

had even feigned to be without disquietude, and this because he wished to reassure them at any cost. Now that he was alone, he still controlled himself, for he felt that he must act and not weep. His heart was crushed, but he bore up against emotion, and instead of lamenting, prepared to defend his son manfully.

Besides, he believed him innocent, and without much trouble he demonstrated the absurdity of the accusation to himself. The old detective knew by experience that a wrong course is often taken at the commencement of a criminal investigation. He was firmly convinced that there had been some mistake in the present case; that his former sub, Piédouche, had foolishly allowed himself to be deluded by coincidences and carried away by officious zeal; that Louis himself had lost his head, and had insufficiently, or, what is worse, clumsily explained himself.

Now M. Lecoq was past master in the art of clearing away mistakes, rectifying erroneous impressions, and presenting facts in their true light. So he did not doubt but that he would soon wring from his son a sincere confession—a confession which would completely exonerate him, and prove that the police had greatly blundered in arresting him on mere presumptions. Nevertheless, the old detective did not deceive himself as to the gravity of the situation. The crime had caused a great commotion. The newspapers talked of nothing but this mystery of the Rue de l'Arbalète. Public opinion was excited. People were surprised that the investigations had not resulted in some conclusive discovery, and blamed the detectives for not being able to arrest the assassin. Under these circumstances, the chief of the criminal investigation service and the magistrates naturally attached great importance to proving that the first person arrested was the murderer; and thus they were seriously disposed to entertain the charges against Louis.

Even the most upright and intelligent magistrates may become prejudiced like other men in questions which touch their professional pride, and it costs them a great deal to recognize their errors. Father Lecoq knew very well that in the unequal struggle he was about to engage in he would encounter three formidable opponents: justice, the police, and public sentiment, which is always in favour of the condemnation of the accused when appearances are against him. He also knew that his son, even though liberated for want of proof, would come out of the conflict greatly injured, for his head was not alone at stake. Rightly or wrongly, the innocence of a person who has been discharged or acquitted is but little believed in, and the mere fact of his having been tried, or even incarcerated, leaves a stain upon his reputation which it is difficult to wash out. However, the old man still hoped that if Louis frankly explained matters he would be at once released. If this deplorable adventure should so terminate, no one would know of it except the head judicial authorities and Madame Lecomte and Thérèse, who were certainly more disposed to pity the young man than to reproach him for his imprudence.

Strong in his conviction, and confident in his own mental powers, M. Lecoq no longer amused himself in framing plans. He completed his toilet, gave some orders to his housekeeper, and then started for the dépôt of the Prefecture of the police. He was thoroughly acquainted with the ways of this prison, where murderers and thieves, beggars and wandering children, are momentarily "deposited," to use the professional term. All the human waifs and strays from the streets of Paris are, in the first place, stranded at the dépôt. They do not remain there, but when arrested, no

matter from what motive, this prison is invariably their first place of sojourn.

This repository of crime and misery, which is of recent construction, occupies the basement of the new part of the Palais de Justice. It cannot be seen from the quays, as it is surrounded by high buildings. The prison vans, which come to the dépôt with charges, taken from the different police stations of Paris, arrive by the Quai de l'Horloge, but another entry is reached on crossing the courtyard of the Sainte Chapelle, and this was the route taken by M. Lecoq. He did not care to meet the inspectors and officers who are constantly passing in and out of the criminal investigation offices. Some of them had been in the service since his own time, and they would have been much astonished to see him treading ground he had not visited for several years.

The poor old man still trusted that his name would not be mixed up in the affair which occupied the thoughts of everybody in Paris, and especially of every one connected with the Prefecture. He expected that at the office of the prison he would meet the chief, who had promised to arrange an interview with the prisoner, and who would, no doubt, not care to confide the troubles of his friend Lecoq to subaltern officials. However, it was Piédouche whom he saw stationed before the prison door, in the attitude of a man who is waiting for somebody. The ex-detective was by no means pleased to meet the man who had arrested his son. But he had sufficient control over himself not to show his feelings, and went straight towards him.

Piédouche looked even more embarrassed than M. Lecoq—the fact is he was sincerely afflicted that in the discharge of his duty he caused such great sorrow to his former chief. He took his hat in his hand, and was trying to think of something to say by way of excusing himself, when M. Lecoq gently exclaimed: "Well, my boy, and so you made a dash last evening. Oh, I'm not angry with you; you are not the only one who is mistaken in this. Your patron told me all about it this morning, and I don't wonder that you were imposed upon. The pocket-book trick was splendidly executed, and, for my own part, I thank you for having acted with gentleness. My son is about to be married, and to have been disgraced in his mother-in-law's house would have done him terrible harm."

Piédouche could not believe his ears, and asked himself if the good old man had not gone crazy. "One would fancy he expected the wedding to come off just the same," he thought.

"Everything will be arranged this morning," continued M. Lecoq. "Your patron is waiting to take me to this mad-cap, who did not even know enough to send for me last evening so as to avoid sleeping in prison. The whole affair will be settled after a five minutes' chat, for my son will have to tell me the truth. He ought to have commenced in that way, for I am sure there is not enough against him to whip a cat for. These urchins lose their heads as soon as they see the end of a detective's nose. I want you to be there to hear how I will shake it out of him. Knock at the door, my old Piédouche. I'm catching cold from gossiping out here."

"Excuse me, M. Lecoq," stammered the detective, "but you won't find your boy in his cell for a quarter of an hour yet, and the governor put me here to beg of you to wait for him."

"Where is Louis, then? Has he been transferred to Mazas? No, that isn't possible."

"He has been called before the investigating magistrate."

"Already!" exclaimed the old man sadly.

"Yes. The magistrate came early expressly ; but the first examination never lasts long, especially as the governor has not yet had time to obtain information without which the examination can't proceed ; so within ten minutes your son will return to the prison."

M. Lecoq turned pale. The news the detective had just given him upset all his plans. He was exceedingly anxious to see Louis before he appeared before a magistrate—to see him so as to draw the exact truth from him, and to show him, as soon as he could determine upon it, the proper system of defence ; to put him on guard against questions that would be asked of him, and warn him of the danger there was in saying too much or in remaining silent. It was not that the father believed in his son's guilt, but he wanted to guard against his imprudence ; and, besides, the practice of his profession had taught him that it did not suffice for a man to be innocent to exonerate himself easily. Now, however, it was too late. A clerk had already recorded the first answers of the accused, and these answers, given amid the agitation caused by an unexpected arrest, would serve as the basis for a capital charge.

"What has he said ?" M. Lecoq asked himself in anguish.

He did not remain long in doubt. At the end of the passage, enclosed on one side by the buttresses of the Saint-Chapelle, he suddenly saw the chief of the investigation service talking with an inspector of police, and then, a little in the rear, came his son Louis, pale and haggard, with bowed head and walking between two Gardes de Paris, one of whom held him by a small chain which he had passed over his wrist. Yes, there was his son, walking with the uncertain step of a condemned man who is being led to the scaffold !

XI.

At this moment Father Lecoq had a vision. It seemed to him that in the shadow cast by the high buttresses of the Saint-Chapelle he could see the red arms of the guillotine, the gloomy door of the prison of La Roquette, the crowd, the gendarmes, and the vehicle of the prison-chaplain, all the terrible yet vulgar preparations for an execution such as he had often witnessed unmoved. But this time Louis was the victim, and the old detective shuddered on thinking that among the criminals he had delivered up to justice there had perhaps been one who was innocent like his son.

The chief of the investigation service at once understood the feelings of this father on seeing his son between two Gardes de Paris, and to save them both a painful meeting he quickly advanced and placed himself in such a way that the young man, who was walking along with his eyes cast down might pass without seeing Lecoq. M. de Gentilly passed by in fact without raising his eyes, and the guards who conducted him led him into the prison. The inspector of police entered with them, and Piédouche discreetly stood aside.

"Well ?" asked M. Lecoq, as soon as he found himself alone with the chief.

"Well, old comrade," replied the functionary sadly, "I have nothing good to tell you. Your son has just been questioned. I had hoped that he would not be called for examination till about noon, but the affair is so serious that the magistrate was ahead of time."

"Unfortunately ; for if I had seen Louis beforehand, I should have brought the matter to light—all would have been explained ; whereas now,

the poor boy no doubt lost his head, and has given answers which will compromise him."

"No, for he said next to nothing. He persists in asserting that the murdered woman's portrait was put into his pocket-book by the pick-pocket."

"And why not?" asked the old man, earnestly.

"That is impossible, my friend, and he has chosen a bad—a very bad course. He has just been confronted with the thief, who persisted in his statements, and gave such precise details that your son was reduced to silence. And, in such cases, silence is almost equal to a confession. Besides, we have already made inquiries respecting the Englishman, and we are certain that he only reached Paris yesterday morning by the Northern Railway."

"And so Louis' course consists in pretending that he did not know the victim at all."

"Why, yes; and between you and I, that course is not tenable. I have already told you why. Without speaking of the queen of spades—the card which is precisely missing from the pack we found in his apartments—it is certain that your son entered the cottage on the night after the crime; I was there, and I have since recognised his voice. Piédouche, who talked with him that night in the street, also recognised him by his eyebrows, his beard, and grey easter gloves. Finally, we have found in his wardrobe the coat and comforter he wore when he came to the Rue de l'Arbalète at midnight."

"At midnight?" repeated M. Lecoq in a low voice.

"Yes; you passed the evening with him, but you certainly left him before midnight. You see these are abundant proofs, and we shall certainly discover others. For that reason, my friend, the greatest service you can render him is to advise him not to continue denying evidence."

"Then you still authorise me to see him?"

"I promised you so, and I am going to keep my promise, my dear Lecoq. I have, besides, consulted the examining magistrate, who is not opposed to your having an interview with your son—but one only, and in my presence. I hope the result will be to decide your son to make a confession; for if he is guilty, he is perhaps less so than his silence would lead one to suppose. See that his lawyer is at least able to plead extenuating circumstances."

The old man started at this phrase, for it reminded him of the Assizes. His allusions were vanishing one after another. However, he put a good face on the matter, and it was in a firm voice that he replied to the chief, "Thanks, my dear friend, I did not expect less from you; but I have a proposal to make which I have no doubt will be agreeable to you. You wish to be present at the interview I am to have with Louis; I understand that and don't object to it. I even wish you should not lose a word of what is said, but I also desire that Louis shall not know you are listening. You have, of course, a cell with such apertures in the partition that a man in the adjoining cell can see and hear everything?"

"No. 10, which he occupies, is precisely fixed for a surveillance from outside; but I can't guess what your object is in wishing me to hide—"

"You will understand it presently," said the old man, straightening himself up. "The arguments you have used have not convinced me. You grant me, I suppose, some authority in these matters? Very well, I see in them nothing but presumptions, and when necessary, I will show that they

are not weighty. But I shall not have to go that far ; for I am sure, positively sure, that Louis is innocent, and that it is only necessary for me to question him for his innocence to appear clearly even to those who are the most prejudiced against him. Before you, he will do as he did yesterday, as he has just done before the examining magistrate. He will refuse to speak. But he will hide nothing from me ; and, as you will be within hearing, you will hear the whole truth. You accept, do you not ? ”

“ It would be unseemly on my part to refuse, for you thus give us an advantage I should not have dared to ask of you. But be careful, my dear Lecoq. The course is a dangerous one, and in employing it you risk everything. Suppose your son is guilty, and that he confesses it to you—he is lost, for my duty will compel me to repeat what I hear, and then—”

“ I know what I risk,” said the old man, coldly, “ and I persist in my plan. You would approve of my doing so if you knew Louis as well as I know him. He has his faults, but he is good—he is loyal, and, above all, he is incapable of a cowardly act. And you know, my old friend, that I am not like many others. A man sees clearly when he makes it a profession to study his fellow-creatures, as I have done for thirty years or more. I have studied this boy ever since he came into the world, and I know him by heart. You might tell me that my son had killed some one in a moment of anger, and I should reply that it was possible ; but when you tell me that he premeditated an abominable murder, and deliberately laid his plans for getting rid of the body, I boldly reply to you that he has not done it.”

“ One may begin by violence and end in deliberately planning,” said the chief in a low voice ; and then he continued aloud : “ I have no further objection to offer, my dear Lecoq. I will have you conducted to No. 10.”

“ One word more,” said the old man. “ It is not admissible that everything is against Louis. Some serious indications accuse him, I admit, but there must be some weak points in the accusation. Can you point them out to me without prejudice to your official duties ? ”

“ Weak points ! why, I do not see any, to my great regret ; at the most, there are but a few gaps in the chain of evidence. For instance, the man who came to the cottage at night-time, told Piédouche that he belonged to the police, and even exhibited an officer’s card ; and this card was not found at your son’s residence. It is true that the inspection of his rooms is not yet finished.”

“ Where could he have procured it ? He knows no one at the Prefecture, and is totally ignorant of the fact that I was formerly employed there.”

“ Then, again,” continued the chief, without replying to this argument, “ he has not yet been confronted with the mute who carried the trunk. If, as I fear, the mute recognizes him, your son is lost. Until then, he may still keep up his defence.”

“ He will defend himself much better, afterwards,” said M. Lecoq, confidently, “ for it will be proved that the mute never saw him, and I desire they should be brought together as soon as possible.”

“ It will be done to-day or to-morrow. The question is, whether they shall be brought face to face in the office of the examining magistrate or elsewhere. Some are for one course, and some for the other.”

“ Where is the mute ? ”

“ At Mazas, and your son will be transferred there within forty-eight hours. I have permission to use my discretion in arranging the confrontation and the choice of the place. I shall consult with Tolbiac on the subject.”

"Tolbiac ! I should like very much to see him."

"He will be here in an hour or so, and will be glad to talk with you. He pities you with all his heart, and I have no doubt he would be very happy should the affair turn out well for your son. You see, my dear Lecoq, I play a fair game with you. I know you well enough to feel sure that on your side you won't violate our agreement. You are to be alone with your son for half-an-hour. I rely upon you not to warn him, either by word or sign, that I am listening to your conversation."

"I give you my word of honour as to that."

"Come, then. It is you, remember, who wished your son to be submitted to this test. God grant that it may result favourably for him."

XLI.

THE chief of the investigation service knocked twice at the prison door, which immediately opened as if by enchantment. Prison doors always open easily to those who wish to enter. M. Lecoq followed his conductor, and Piédouche came behind. The officials had changed since the days when the old trail-hunter was the mainstay of the Prefecture, and there was nobody there to recognize him but the clerk and one warder. After a few words with the chief, this warder was ordered to conduct M. Lecoq to the cell bearing the number "10."

It was situated to the left, and adjoined a large paved and glazed hall, with a bright, cheerful aspect. One might have compared it to the grand saloon of an ocean steamer, surrounded with state-rooms. Only the passengers who occupy the state-rooms never go out to take the air on deck. There is also in the prison a common hall in which the "steerage passengers" are crammed. That is to say, the poor wretches who are not thought worthy of a separate lodging-place; the small fry caught in the daily haul of the net. Every evening mattresses are thrown them, and they lie down pell-mell, and snore. At daytime they are permitted to talk and sing, and they sing a great deal in these "infernal regions," so that a poet who might liken them to "the abode of the remorseful," would carry fiction too far.

The prisoners in the cells are not so joyful. They belong to a better class of society, or else are accused of crimes of such a serious character that isolation is considered necessary. Now M. de Gentilly had every claim to this sad favour, and so since his entry into prison he had seen no one but the chief and the guards who had come to conduct him to the magistrate charged with the investigation of his case. His surprise and emotion were very great when, after hearing the bolts which had just shut him in grate back again, he found himself in the presence of his father. The old man opened his arms to his son and pressed him to his heart while the warder was taking his leave.

This moment of effusion was short, however, for M. Lecoq knew he had no time to lose, and he had the strength to curtail his paternal caresses to begin the inquiries which were to decide his son's fate. A slight noise warned him that the chief was listening in the adjoining cell. "My dear Louis," he commenced, in a firm voice, "you are now neither before a detective nor a judge; you are alone with me. I am convinced that it is not necessary for me to tell you that you are the victim of a mistake. Explain it to me, speak plainly, and hide nothing from me."

The young man turned pale. His features contracted. Evidently a con-

flict was going on in his soul between opposing sentiments, and it required an effort on his part to reply. "I have nothing to tell you, father. You know what I am accused of, and must know how I have defended myself, since you have seen my accusers."

Astounded at this declaration, M. Lecoq receded a couple of paces, and exclaimed: "Have I heard aright? Am I becoming insane? What! you are under an accusation which may bring you to the scaffold, an accusation which a word from you may set at naught—and this word you refuse to utter!—when we are alone—when you have no reason to fear that an inadvertent answer may be badly interpreted!"

"I tried to exonerate myself and did not succeed, so I shall try no more."

"But then you wish to be lost. You wish to kill me with sorrow and shame. What drives you to suicide? what impels you to kill your poor father? Are you not happy? Are you not loved?"

"I was so," said Louis, in a hoarse voice.

"Do you think, then, that you are no longer? Have you forgotten that I only live for you—that you are betrothed?"

"Thérèse—you have seen her?"

"Yes, I have seen her. She hastened to my rooms this morning with her mother. The poor women passed a horrible night. But I reassured them; and it was not difficult, for they did not believe, they will never believe, that you are an assassin, and I promised them I would bring you this evening to Boulogne—where they await you."

Louis started and held down his head to hide his tears.

"Look here," continued the old man, earnestly, as he felt that he had touched the right chord. "Mademoiselle Lecomte feels so sure that you will be released that she said to me, laughingly, 'I shall be so glad to see him again that I shall not have the courage to scold him, but he will have to explain to me why he carried a woman's portrait next his heart.'"

"She said that to you?—she spoke to you of that portrait?"

"Yes; and I am sure that you will have no trouble in quieting her jealousy, for you did not know this Englishwoman, whom some villain stabbed, any more than you knew the man who was killed in the cottage in the Rue de l'Arbalète. Do you frequent fast women and debauched merchants, you who adore a pure young girl, and who for the past three months have spent your time at her mother's, far from this Tour de Nesle of the Mouffetard neighbourhood? Do you even know where the Rue de l'Arbalète is?"

"Thérèse will never forgive me," murmured Louis, instead of replying to this moving apostrophe.

"You are silent!" exclaimed the wretched father. "So you will have no pity for me—nor for your betrothed? Don't you see, then, that you drive me to despair?"

"God reads the heart—He will be my judge. I have nothing to say in my justification further than what I have already said."

"And so you persist in affirming that this portrait did not belong to you—that it was placed in your pocket-book without your knowledge?"

"Yes."

"Then what were you doing at the Morgue in a disguise?"

"A foolish curiosity took me there, and as I did not wish to be noticed in the crowd, I put on some old clothes to go in."

"That may very well be," said M. Lecoq, struck by the assurance with

which his son expressed himself now. "But those cards which were found in your rooms—those cards spread out on a table in a secret place?"

"That is a souvenir," replied the young man, after a little hesitation.

"A souvenir! What does it mean?"

"Yes, a souvenir—of Germany. When I was a student at Heidelberg, I was smitten, as you know, with the daughter of one of the professors. We passed many hours together; she loved to play at patience—so as to find out if we should be married to each other. The day on which I was to inform her of my return to France, I found her bending over the cards, which told her that she would be my wife. She had succeeded in the game. She exacted of me that I would take this strange pledge of happiness away with me, and made me swear that I would arrange the cards in the same order on a table at my own house in Paris, and leave them so until my father consented to our union. I was still in love, you remember, when you brought me away very much against my will, and I consented to this child's play. For six or seven years the cards have been thus arranged in a recess which I never enter."

"And you did not relate this story to the examining magistrate?"

"What use would it have been? He would have thought I was inventing an untruth."

"But a grave accusation is not based on an insignificant coincidence."

"The fact is that it is not proof. The prosecution would never dare to ask a man's head of a jury because he happened to have in his house a pack of cards from which the queen of spades was missing."

"But—the envelope which was found at the house of the murdered woman—they pretend that it is directed in your handwriting."

"They are mistaken."

"And the chief of the investigation service, who recognised your voice? And the officer who recognised your face and your clothes?"

"They are mistaken."

Louis now expressed himself with a distinctness which strongly contrasted with the embarrassment apparent in his replies at the commencement of the interview. An observer—and there was one of the shrewdest behind the partition—would have no doubt remarked that, after hesitating as to whether he should give way to his father's exhortations and confess he had suddenly decided to persevere in the course of absolute denial which he had adopted from the first. Perhaps this observer would also have noticed that this change of attitude and language dated from the moment when M. Lecoq had spoken of Mademoiselle Lecomte's jealous disquietude.

However, the father still thought that his son was the victim of a judicial error, and said to him earnestly: "My dear child, appearances are against you, and it will take time for the truth to come to light. You will be left to yourself, for I don't expect I shall again obtain the favour of seeing you. Continue to defend yourself, and don't lose courage. Information will be sought for against you; but I also will seek information, and prove your innocence. You doubt my success?" asked the old man, who read his son's face. "Ah, you don't know that the solving of mysteries is my profession. I have until now hidden from you the fact that I was formerly occupied in judicial investigations. I should have liked to have hidden it from you always, but I am anxious to reassure you and—"

"I knew it," muttered the young man.

"You knew it! How did you know it?" exclaimed M. Lecoq, imprudently.

"Why, one day, while searching among your papers for a letter you wished to read over, I found a detective's card, on which your name was written!"

XLII.

HAD a thunderbolt fallen at M. Lecoq's feet, he would not have been more astounded than he was by this answer, which he had, alas! himself provoked. His son had just confessed to him that he had had a detective's card in his possession, and this confession had been heard by the chief, who was listening behind the partition. The unfortunate boy had, with one word, demolished all the effect which his clear answers and the persistence of his denials had produced upon a man with whom evidence had such great weight. This card—why should he not suppose it was the very one which the assassin had exhibited to Piédouche at the gate of the cottage in the Rue de l'Arbalète? Nevertheless, the distressed father still hoped that an explanation would repair the evil, or, at least attenuate it. "You never spoke to me of this discovery?" he said anxiously.

"No; I was afraid of grieving you," replied Louis, casting down his eyes. Then, raising his head again: "Need I tell you that I love you no less than before?" he continued, affectionately.

"Have you known this long?" asked M. Lecoq, trembling.

"Only a few days. But I must make you a confession. It displeased me to see your name on that card so I took it and burned it."

"Immediately?"

"Why, yes. There was a fire in your study and I threw it into it. Did I act wrongly?"

"No—oh, no!" exclaimed the old man, who felt somewhat comforted by this declaration. "Years ago I gave up a profession which I chose from taste, and which I always exercised honestly. I only ask to blot out the remembrance of it—on your account—on account of the family which you are about to enter. And yet it is to my former connection with the worthy functionary who now has charge of the criminal investigation service, that I owe the opportunity of talking with you at this moment. Don't think that he is hostile towards you. He pities you, and wishes with all his heart that your innocence may be proved—for everybody here loves me. Why, the detective who arrested you was formerly one of my own assistants, and he had tears in his eyes when he spoke about you to me. I tell you all this so that you may not be discouraged, my dear boy. Remember that I have but one thought—to prove that you are not guilty. And I will soon succeed. I have cleared up more complicated affairs than yours. Do you wish to know how I shall commence? Well, you read in the papers the account of how the body in the trunk was found. You know that this trunk was carried by a mute, who either could not or would not give any explanation. That mute certainly knows the assassin, who preceded him by a few steps along the street where he was arrested—"

"Well," interrupted Louis, "let them bring me face to face with him."

"Then," asked the father, who could not conceal his delight, "you wish the confrontation to take place?"

"I ardently desire it, and if I have not already asked it of the investigating magistrate it is because I felt sure that they would come to it sooner or later."

"Ah!" exclaimed M. Lecoq, "if I could ever have doubted you, I will

doubt you no more now. My friend, the chief of the investigation service, has promised me that you shall see the mute to-day or to-morrow. When it is clearly proved that he does not know you, the rest will go all alone. I will charge myself with demolishing all the rest of the accusing evidence, and it won't be difficult, for really it does not hold together. And I will make it warm for that English pickpocket, who so nicely rids himself of a compromising photograph. It is really curious that they believed the word of a rogue of that kind. But I am prattling, and the moments are precious. Embrace me, my dear boy, and be patient. I will see my friend, arrange with him about the confrontation, and find time to go to Boulogne. I will reassure Madame Lecomte, and tell her daughter that in three weeks' time you will be married, and on your way to Italy."

"Tell her, too, that I love her, and have never loved any one but her," murmured Louis, throwing himself into his father's arms.

Their leave-taking was short, for M. Lecoq was in a hurry to meet the chief whom he now expected to find favourably disposed. He was somewhat taken aback when they met in a room behind the clerk's office.

"My dear fellow," said the chief, at once, "I confess that after hearing the conversation between yourself and your son, I am not much more enlightened than I was before. His attitude and explanations don't add to the evidence against him, I admit; neither do they prove his innocence. He even involuntarily made a very serious confession."

"The officer's card he found at my house? He cannot have made use of it, for he threw it immediately into the fire."

"He says so, but justice will not be obliged to believe him. And just notice one bad circumstance: your card was twenty years old, and Piédouche remembers very well that the man with the comforter showed him one of the old type."

"Piédouche is a good fellow; but you know as well as I do that he is apt to get muddled, and when a man gets muddled he makes mistakes."

"Oh, I don't dispute that, but I am merely looking at the chances, both good and bad. Thus the sentimental story your son tells, is quite plausible, but it will not be easy to verify it."

"Why so? It will only be necessary to write to Heidelberg."

"Quite so, but I doubt if his lady-love of seven years ago will be disposed to admit that she played patience before the war with a Frenchman. And then that portrait in which the murdered woman is represented as arranging those cards—there is something in that which will impress a jury. The prosecuting counsel will call attention to the fact that the accused formerly lived in England, and that the woman herself is English."

"The pickpocket is a countryman of hers."

"My reply to that is, that he will be examined and cross-examined—as they say in London. He is already sure of six months' imprisonment. If there is any light to be obtained from that quarter it will be had, you may be sure of it; but I fear that it won't warrant your son's discharge."

"We shall see about that. As for me, I think the whole thing hangs there; but there is something else to try just now."

"No doubt. We have, in the first place, to see if the foot-prints of the accused are like those left by the assassin in the snow—you know I had impressions taken of the tracks. Then there will be the confrontation with the neighbours; the coal-dealer and his wife, and others—"

"I very much hope that you will commence with the mute."

"That was already my intention, and since I listened to your son, I am

anxious to get to that point. We will then immediately arrange matters, and—ah! here comes Tolbiac, who arrives just in time to give us his opinion.”

The detective had entered cautiously. He bowed to M. Lecoq with mingled politeness and deference, and said to him: “I have heard, sir, of the great misfortune which has befallen you, and I beg you to believe that I sympathize deeply with your sorrow. If the administration honour me by charging me with the pursuit of this deplorable affair, you may be sure that I will endeavour—without betraying my trust—to establish your son’s innocence.”

The old man, who was much affected, thanked him.

“You were right in telling your son that everybody here was for you,” continued the chief. “We will take the great step this very day. Come, Tolbiac, the question is to bring the prisoner into the presence of the mute. You must feel the importance of this test. Are you in favour of its taking place here in the prison, or at Mazas?”

“Since you choose to consult me,” replied the detective, after reflecting a little, “I will submit some remarks which I think are worthy of consideration. For the test to be decisive, it must take place under certain conditions. The mute is an intelligent man—at least, I have been told so, for I have not seen him. I had my reasons for that; and, by the way, it has occurred to me that they were astonished at the ‘establishment’ by the persistence with which I avoided meeting him. It needed but little, I believe, for the officials to accuse me of being his accomplice,” added M. Tolbiac, laughing.

“It was not that; only I thought that you were taking too much time over this matter.”

“If I had met him, I should not now be able to make the following proposal. I offer to conduct the mute myself—who does not know me, mark that point—to conduct him, I say, to the residence of M. Louis Lecoq.”

“Why not here?”

“Because, if this man has been in the service of the accused—excuse the supposition, my dear M. Lecoq—it is very evident that, meeting his master in a cell at Mazas or in this prison, he will readily guess that his master is under arrest, like himself, and he will play the same comedy he has perhaps already played elsewhere. Whereas, if it is arranged in such a way that he is led to think he is to be released, he will easily allow himself to be conducted by me to the apartment in the Rue du Mont-Thabor where M. Louis will await him—under your surveillance, of course.”

“I do not exactly understand.”

“What! don’t you understand that in order to determine the prisoner’s guilt or innocence in a positive manner, it will suffice for you to be present at this meeting without the mute knowing of your being there?”

XLIII.

“ONE of two things is certain,” continued Tolbiac: “either the mute is the accomplice of M. Louis Lecoq—and, in that case, if on seeing him again he believes himself alone with him, he will express the satisfaction he feels at this unhopd for meeting by gestures or otherwise—or, on the contrary, he has never seen M. Louis, and in that case, which is much more probable, he will not express himself at all, and M. Louis’ innocence will be fully

shown. We will be the first, you and I, to attest that the trial was decisive; that it is evident the accused never had the least connection with the man who carried the corpse on his back, and that, consequently, he is not and cannot be the assassin. I am convinced that our report will decide the examining magistrate to issue an order of release. Whereas, a confrontation in his office, or at Mazas, or here in the prison, will leave him in doubt, for he will always suspect the mute of feigning not to know M. Lecoq."

"Yes," said the chief of the investigation service, "the course you propose will give us a conclusive proof one way or the other. For my part, I have no objection to employing it; and it depends on me whether it shall be tried or not, for I have been given almost *carte-blanche* in the matter. Nevertheless, it is so different from the ordinary method that I should like to confer about it with the magistrate charged with the investigation."

"The magistrate won't oppose an interview under these conditions, if you suggest he should be present there with you."

"To be present—concealed?"

"No doubt. I am not acquainted with the prisoner's residence in the Rue du Mont-Thabor, but it is, of course, composed of several rooms. You will be in one of them, and M. Louis Lecoq in another. The communicating door will be left partly open. No light in your room, but a great deal of light in the one where the meeting will take place. You will see everything as though you were at a theatre, and will not be seen."

"The idea is really not a bad one. It remains to be seen if it pleases my old friend," said the chief.

"I think it excellent, and not only does it please me," exclaimed M. Lecoq, "but the greatest favour you can do me is to put it into execution this very day."

"You have well reflected on the possible consequences of this confrontation? You have taken into account that one gesture escaping the mute, one movement of this man's features, may lead to your son's condemnation? If he betrays himself—and he will betray himself if he knows the accused, for he will not suspect that he is observed—if he betrays himself, nothing could change the disastrous effects of this first scene—neither your son's impasiveness nor the rapid change in the mute's manner when warned by a frown from his accomplice."

"I know all that, and I persist, for I am sure of Louis. If he were here he would join with me in begging you to make this experiment, which will clearly prove the absurdity of the accusation; and I thank M. Tolbiac both in his name and my own."

"It will be time enough to thank me after the interview, dear sir," said the detective, smiling. "I hope it will terminate to your satisfaction; and frankly, I claim some merit for gratifying your son's wish, for I am greatly interested in discovering the guilty party, and, I admit, I believed I had him."

"How shall we proceed?" asked the chief, so as to curtail Tolbiac's compliments.

"Why, it seems very simple to me. This evening, about eight o'clock, for instance, you will come and take M. Louis Lecoq from here to his residence, after telling him that certain facts are to be verified there, and that he must be present. For I think, and the examining magistrate will certainly agree with me, that the accused ought not to be informed that he is about to be brought into the presence of the mute."

"The test would have no value, except under those conditions," said Father Lecoq, without hesitation.

"I am delighted to see that you are of the same opinion on this point, dear sir. We will say, then, that M. Louis is taken to the Rue du Mont-Thabor. You arrive there about half-past eight. You go up to his rooms, taking care, of course, that the concierge does not suspect his tenant to be under arrest. You will leave the officers outside, except one—the most intelligent, who will enter the apartment with you and remain in the ante-room. You install M. Louis in the sitting-room, and pretend to commence your search in the adjoining one. Ten minutes, or a quarter of an hour later, the bell rings—it is the mute. The officer opens the door. The mute takes him for a servant, and allows himself to be shown into the sitting-room. The rest will then be your business, my dear chief."

"Very good, but who will take charge of conducting the mute from Mazas to the Rue du Mont-Thabor?"

"I, if you see no objection. He doesn't know me; and, by-the-bye, you will allow me to remark that I was right to refuse to see him up to the present, for if he knew me he would mistrust me, and it is absolutely necessary he should follow me willingly."

"How will you get him to do so?"

"In the first place, I beg you to give instructions so that everything at Mazas may take place in such a way that the mute will believe that he is really to be given his liberty. None of the usual formalities on releasing a prisoner are to be neglected. He is certainly sufficiently intelligent to understand that if the order of release were not genuine this would not be done."

"More intelligent than you think; and the deuce of it is that we have already played this comedy when we let him out of the dépôt; but then I admit he won't have to be begged to leave the prison. Now, suppose he is in the street; under what pretext will you approach him?"

"I shan't approach him; I shall make him a sign."

"Explain yourself more clearly, dear friend."

"This is my idea. You remember that the two police agents declared that just as they arrested the man with the trunk they heard a carriage start off. Now we are all of opinion that this carriage awaited the individual who preceded the mute, and who got into it when he perceived that his accomplice was arrested?"

"Certainly."

"Very well; I conclude from that fact that the mute must be in the service of a man who owns a carriage. You don't employ a cab for the purpose of carrying a corpse. So, if the mute, once outside, should see a brougham standing before the prison door, and close to the brougham a well-dressed gentleman, who called him by an inviting gesture, it is allowable to suppose he would not run away. It is even probable that he would approach to see whom he had to deal with?"

"That's possible, but he would soon discover that he was mistaken."

"Why so? The individual described by the two policemen was of medium height—like me—he had his coat-collar turned up to cover his ears—I will do the same—"

"And you suppose that our man will make up his mind to get into your carriage?"

"I have no doubt of it, and, once he is inside, everything will go smoothly. I shall not have to converse with him, for a man cannot converse with a deaf-mute. If he gesticulates, I will gesticulate as well, and I shall have no trouble in quieting him, for he will believe I am taking

him to a place of safety. Just consider it. He comes out at Mazas, and finds a carriage awaiting him. He naturally thinks that his employer has had sufficient influence to procure his release, and has come in search of him. And when he perceives that I am not his employer, he will take me for a friend sent by his employer to meet him."

"But when he arrives at M. Lecoq's residence?"

"If he has been there before, he won't hesitate to enter. If, on the contrary, he makes any trouble, I will find the means to persuade him. Well, my dear chief, do you agree to this?"

"The course is somewhat complicated," said the chief, after a little reflection; "but it will do as well as another. Only you can't take upon yourself alone the responsibility of such an important operation."

"I have no wish to do so, of course! The mute would only have to walk off without paying any attention to me, and I should find myself in trouble, for I could not follow him in a carriage. So, place at least two detectives on guard before the door at Mazas, and let them be fellows who have already seen our man."

"Piédouche and Pigache will answer our purpose very well."

"Yes, providing they disguise themselves, for they must not be recognised by the mute."

"That's understood. Come to my office about noon; between now and then I will see the magistrate, and we will agree upon our plan with the two officers. The matter is a delicate one, and we must anticipate and arrange everything—the time, the place where your brougham will wait, and the steps to be taken in case our man tries to get away."

"We will arrange that together, my dear sir; and I am sure everything will work well."

"Will you allow me to await you this evening at your office after the interview?" asked M. Lecoq of the chief.

"Yes, old friend," replied the functionary, pressing the old man's hands; "and I shall be very happy if I have good news to give you."

Tolbiac was again profuse in ardent protestations, and Father Lecoq, touched by the sympathy expressed for him, went his way with his heart full of gratitude and hope.

XLIV.

It was some time after night had set in when a very elegant brougham turned into the Boulevard Mazas. It was dark blue, drawn by a black horse, and driven by a coachman enveloped in furs. This handsome equipage turned briskly to the left, and stopped by the prison wall, at ten paces or so from the great arched gate, which only opens for the prison vans to leave or enter.

Two men alighted from the vehicle, and walked towards the terminus of the Lyons line, very quiet just then, for it still was too early for the evening trains. They seemed to be looking for somebody, and one of them said to the other, between his teeth: "They ought to be at their post by now. This isn't the way to perform one's duty well."

"We must make allowance for them, dear sir," replied the other. "They are not made of iron, and if they have gone into a tavern to take a drink, I shouldn't have the heart to be angry with them. Besides," he added, taking out his watch, "they are not in fault. It is we—we are too early."

"But we haven't too much time to give them their instructions, and if they delay another five minutes, I shall suspend them for a month. You think I'm hard, perhaps; but do you know, Tolbiac, that if the officers were not compelled to do their duty like soldiers, we couldn't get along? We are not in England, where police duties are performed in rose-water style. And then, we haven't an ordinary affair on hand this evening. You and I have assumed a great responsibility, and one false move would suffice to get us into a bad scrape. I have had trouble enough to obtain authority to carry out the plan proposed by you; let us be careful not to fail in it."

"We shall not fail, my dear sir; our precautions are too well taken."

"Nevertheless, I insist upon it, we must have the manœuvre repeated under our eyes. In the first place, your brougham will stop exactly where it is at this moment."

"Be easy; I have a quick eye and I shall be there to give the proper orders to my coachman."

"He is reliable, this coachman?"

"Reliable and discreet. During the six months he has been in my service he hasn't once tattled with my other servants nor with my concierge. If he had I should know it, for they would have told me."

"And he won't be surprised at your stopping twice in the same evening by the wall of Mazas?"

"He thinks that I come to wait for some one by the Lyons train."

"Good! Then it's understood. When we have chatted with our two men you will take me back to the Prefecture, and return so as to be here at eight o'clock precisely. That is the time I fixed for the director to release the mute."

"Oh, I shall be exact; but it is perfectly useless for me to be here before that, for you will not reach the Rue du Mont-Thabor until half-past, and my horse requires but twenty-five minutes to go there. By-the-way, after the confrontation, you will have the mute sent back in a cab, won't you? I don't care to take him back myself."

"I will turn him over to the officers—the rogues are not here yet. But what do you think will be the result of the interview?"

"My faith! I admit that as yet I have formed no opinion about it. I said this morning that it would be favourable to M. Lecoq de Gentilly, but his father was there and I didn't wish to grieve him."

"As to me, I have no doubt, my dear fellow. M. Lecoq is a worthy man whom I love with all my heart, but his son is a rascal of the worst kind, and I am pretty sure that he will lose his head."

"It is evident that if the mute recognises him his account is settled. And then I have written to England. He passed several years there in his youth, and I suspect that he knew the woman of the Rue de l'Arbalète there. If the information I expect reaches me in a few days, as I hope, I shall no doubt have some news for you."

"I hope so—but if I am not mistaken, there are our men looking for us."

In fact, by the aid of the gas-lamps which illuminate the vicinity of the railway station, they saw a commissionaire and a railway-porter approaching them. The former was Pigache; the latter, Piédouche. The chief had recognised them at the first glance, and saw that they were chatting with an individual dressed like a railway employé.

"This is too bad," growled the chief, "and I will shake them soundly. To accost a stranger when on duty, and when they wish to pass for employées of the Lyons railway station—my word of honour, I can't allow that."

Piédouche had no doubt perceived his chief, for he quickly took leave of his chance companion, who walked leisurely towards the station.

"Here you are, you others ; it's fortunate," said the functionary to his tardy soldiers. "You ought to be posted before the door of Mazas, and you loiter about the streets."

"Excuse me, sir," said No. 29, "the surveillance is set for eight o'clock, and as it is now but twenty minutes to seven—"

"Who was that man who was gossiping with you ?"

"A switchman of the Orleans railroad who met us as we arrived, and asked me about an employé of the Lyons line whom he formerly knew. If I had appeared as though I had just fallen from the clouds, he would easily have seen that I was only a sham porter, so I told him a yarn. One must play one's part properly, sir. Then he offered me a drink at the wine-shop opposite, and I couldn't refuse—still because of the part."

"Enough. Instead of drinking with the first comer, you would do better to attend to your duty. If you keep on like this I shall finish by asking your revocation."

"But, yesterday you complimented me, sir," said Piédouche, timidly, "and I am sure M. Tolbiac is not displeased with me. I even think I have gained the reward he promised me."

"I sha'n't give it to you until after the confrontation," said the detective ; "for, indeed, if you are mistaken, if the young man is not the assassin—my faith, I shall owe you nothing."

"That's true," replied Piédouche, somewhat taken aback. "And—you may believe me, if you like—but in that case I shall be quite satisfied not to get it ; for Father Lecoq is so worthy a man, and loves his son so much—"

"Be quiet and listen," interrupted the chief. "You see that brougham over there ?"

"Yes, sir, and I took it in as I passed. Black horse, coachman in furs, carriage-body dark-blue. No danger of my mistaking it."

"Good ! We are now going away in it, but at five minutes to eight it will return, and stop just where it is now."

"Oh, I shall recognise it, and as you explained to me just now what we have to do—"

"I will repeat to you your instructions. You and Pigache will keep yourselves on the other side of the door of Mazas, close to the wall, and will appear to be chatting together—the sentinel will be warned, and will say nothing to you."

"Besides it isn't likely he will see us. We understand keeping out of the way, sir."

"At eight o'clock precisely, you hear, you will see the mute come out of the little door to the right of the main entrance. At the same time, M. Tolbiac will alight from his brougham and make a sign to the mute. Then will be the time to keep your eyes open."

"We will keep them open, sir, never fear."

"And act intelligently. If the mute gets into the carriage with M. Tolbiac, the trick is played, and you have only to take a cab and join us at the Rue du Mont-Thabor. If, on the contrary, the mute tries to slink away—if he saunters about without seeming to know that he is called, you will discreetly follow him. In that case, the order will be not to lose sight of him, and to approach him if, at the end of half an hour, you see that he does not know where to go. You are well enough disguised, so that he will not recognise you. He will consent to follow you if you manage properly ; and

you will bring him to me on foot, or in a cab, as you may think best. I shall not leave the apartment at the Rue du Mont-Thabor until the mute arrives there, either with M. Tolbiac or with you. Is that understood?"

"That's understood, sir."

"Above all, no foolishness. Your position is at stake."

With this threatening recommendation, the chief took Tolbiac's arm and walked toward the blue brougham. Piédouche saw them enter this dapper equipage, which then started off along the Rue de Lyon. "One would think the governor took us for conscripts," he said, shrugging his shoulders. "He has taken an hour to give us instructions, and yet what we have to do isn't so very cunning."

At this moment a hand was laid on his arm, and he heard a voice exclaiming: "No orders, comrade; but do you know those two individuals who have just gone away in that carriage?"

XLV.

PIÉDOUCHE quickly turned round, and saw that the individual who had addressed him with these words was the employé of the Orleans railroad, with whom he had just been fraternising at a wine-shop. Astonished to find him just behind him, and still more astonished at the question he put to him, the detective prudently replied:

"Those citizens there? I never met them before. I don't visit people who keep their carriages, as you may well believe. They were asking me for some information about the new line which has just been opened through Burgundy, as though they couldn't go and read the notice stuck up in the station. But they are all alike, these rich folks; they don't care how much they interfere with a poor porter who is only off for an hour."

"Excuse me," said the stranger; "as you were chatting with them so long I thought—"

"You know them, then, you? Why do you trouble yourself about them?"

"I know one of them."

"Which one?"

"The bigger one. The one who has no beard."

"That must be the owner of the carriage," said Piédouche, with a shrewd air. "When they got in, he made the other get in first. Dash it all! you are in luck to visit such a party."

"I don't visit him; I only know his name and address, that's all."

"What's his name, if I am too not curious?"

"M. Tolbiac de—— I have forgotten what, but he lives in the Rue Godot de Mauroy."

"In the Madeleine quarter? As good style as that?"

"Yes; it is some distance from the Boulevard de l'Hôpital, where I live, and I haven't yet had the time to go and see him; but to-morrow I shall be off duty, and I shall go as far as there."

"You have business with him, then?" asked the detective, who from professional habit never lost an opportunity for making people talk. "I'll bet that you are going to ask him to recommend you to your manager."

"No, it isn't that; but I've found some money he lost—with his visiting-card—and I am anxious to return it to him."

"You had a splendid opportunity while he was here."

"Yes, but I hadn't the money with me. And then, I want to talk with him."

"Of course—for the reward—"

"I don't care a fig for the reward, and it isn't to say anything agreeable that I shall go to see him."

"What has he done to you, then?"

"Imagine to yourself that last week he came to see me at my switch, to talk to me about a so-called heritage which will come to my daughter, and that the little one was very nearly run over by a train, while picking up some gold pieces he had scattered on the track. He went away most abruptly; and, as he appeared to be up to some mischief, I want to ask him why he came to me with his humbug."

"Well, now, that's a strange story," exclaimed Piédouche, who had listened with much attention to the switchman's narrative. "All the same, in your place, I shouldn't provoke that fellow. He must have a long arm. But excuse me, comrade. My wife is waiting for me, and I have invited my friend here to take some soup with us."

"It is I who ask to be excused for keeping you here gossiping so long. Good-day, but not farewell. Whenever you have business at the Orleans station, ask for Pierre Cambremer; anybody will tell you where I am, and we will take a drink together."

"That won't be refused," said the sham porter, as he walked away with Pigache, the false commissionaire.

When they reached the corner of the Rue des Charbonniers, which crosses the Boulevard Mazas at fifty yards from the prison, Piédouche stopped and turned round to assure himself that the switchman had not followed them. Then, knowing that Cambremer must have entered the station, since he could no longer see him, he began to laugh, and said to Pigache: "There's a fellow who doesn't suspect that he had to do with a detective. How strangely it happened, though, that he should meet Tolbiac just when Tolbiac was working for the 'establishment!' He would have been nicely vexed if he had spoken to him. That shows that in our profession a man must always reckon on the unforeseen."

"It is to be hoped that he won't come back and bother us just as the mute comes out," growled Pigache.

"No danger; we shall see him in the distance, and he won't see us, as we shall be sticking close to the wall. I say, old fellow, do you know that Tolbiac is a famous bouncer, all the same, and that he simply humbugs the governor when he brags that he will clear up the Rue de l'Arbalète affair in one month? The devil run away with me if he has even taken hold of it. He passes all his time over some inheritance business, which he must expect to make a deal out of. As a proof of that, see what the switchman has just told us."

"That makes no difference to me; but still I don't like him at all, with his Englishified manners."

"Did you hear him just now, when I spoke of the thousand franc note, without seeming to mean it? How quick he took me up. He hit me good, though, when he said he wouldn't give it to me until after the confrontation, as we may not have caught the real assassin; still I should like to be as sure of getting my money as I'm sure that Lecoq's son killed the woman and the merchant." And Piédouche took up his usual refrain: "Poor Father Lecoq! what a sorrow he will have. This is what comes of spoiling children and making dandies of them. If he had put his son with

us, this wouldn't have happened. For all that, he is a good man. I served under him years ago. He made no fuss about a thousand francs, but when he made a promise, he kept it. And his method was a great deal better than Tolbiac's. Father Lecoq would never have wasted all this time about the confrontation. Such airs! just to show himself off with his English system. But at the 'establishment' they are all infected. I want to know if the mute would not have recognised the accused just as well at the prison?"

"Without taking into account that these artful dodges sometimes miscarry. We always have the worst of it, and if there's a hitch, why, we shall be blamed."

"That's so, but what then?" said Piédouche, philosophically. "Everybody can't be general, nor even officer, and the blows come by right to the soldier."

"Enough jaw, old fellow; the half-hour has just struck. Now's the time for us to go on duty."

Pigache said no more, and the two detectives walked gently towards the prison, passed along the wall, and stopped, according to their orders, at ten paces from the door. They concealed themselves in the shadow thrown by the high wall, against which they leaned and waited, motionless, silent, and attentive. It was very cold, and snowing a little. The sentinel had taken refuge in his watch-box, and after night-fall in winter there are but few passers-by on the Boulevard Mazas.

On the other hand, the Rue de Lyon had become more animated since the time for the evening express drew near. Cabs laden with baggage, private carriages, and omnibuses arrived in a file from the direction of the Bastille, and, leaving Mazas to the left, took their way up the somewhat steep ascent conducting to the station. Others returned after depositing their passengers outside the terminus. It was the season when people willingly start for Italy and Monaco, and there was any number of vehicles in the courtyard of the station and the adjacent streets.

"How stupid he is, this Tolbiac!" growled Piédouche, bothered in his surveillance by this incessant going to and fro. "As though he couldn't have chosen some other time for getting his mute away."

He and his comrade were, in fact, somewhat troubled in watching the vehicles of all kinds which passed before them. However, as they did not come from the same direction, there was no danger of their making a mistake, and so they waited without much anxiety for the arrival of the expected brougham. The clock at the railway station struck the three-quarters, and the locomotion increased still more. The train was about to start, and tardy travellers arrived in crowds.

Ten minutes elapsed, and just as the minute-hand reached the figure eleven, a brougham turned the corner of the Rue de Lyon, and drew up close to the wall, ten paces on the other side of the door, and consequently twenty paces from the two officers.

"It's he," murmured Piédouche. "I cannot make out the colour of the brougham, but I know the horse. Nevertheless, it seems to me that the coachman hasn't got his furs on as he had a little while ago. He might very well have looked after his lamps, too, the animal—they don't give much light."

"And who could it be if it wasn't Tolbiac?" asked Pigache, in a low voice. "Would any one else amuse himself by stopping outside the prison?"

Piédouche was no doubt of the same opinion as his comrade, for he said

nothing. Eight o'clock struck. The little door opened and was closed again almost immediately. A turnkey had just pushed the mute outside.

XLVI.

ON seeing the mute appear, the detectives were careful not to stir. The part assigned them by their chief was a strictly passive one. They were there merely to watch the movements of the man who had just been released, and to follow him in case he should decide not to get into the carriage. The rest concerned M. Tolbiac, and as the blue brougham had been in its place for the last five minutes, they were free from responsibility for the time being. So they contented themselves with looking on, and did not lose sight of the mute, who took three steps in advance and then suddenly stopped, as if dazzled by the lights of the station and bewildered by the crowd of vehicles.

He looked straight before him without turning his head to the right or to the left. One would have thought he was taking his bearings.

"He won't give us much trouble," murmured Piédouche. "He doesn't look as though he wanted to run away."

All at once a brougham attached to a black horse, driven by a coachman in furs, slowly left line the of the vehicles which were approaching the terminus, and drew up with remarkable precision about four yards on the other side of the main entrance, thus hiding the carriage which had arrived five minutes earlier, and which the detectives had taken for Tolbiac's. There was no mistake about it, the last to arrive was the right one. By the light of its two lamps, which burned as brightly as possible, one could distinguish the shade of the carriage, the colour of the horse blanket, and the fox-skin tippet worn by the coachman. Besides, the carriage door at once opened, and a man enveloped in an ample overcoat stepped to the ground just as the mute, tired of looking at the gas lights, turned his head to the right. The man who had alighted from the brougham motioned to him with one hand, while with the other he held open the carriage door, and without the least hesitation, the mute walked towards the person who addressed him these friendly signs.

"It goes as though it moved on wheels," said Piédouche, in a low voice. "That fool of a mute asks no better than to be carried off. Let's see, however, if he will get in. My faith! yes, he's inside already."

The thing had been quickly done. The mute had approached the gentleman with the long overcoat and had entered the brougham, without ado. Then the gentleman had sprung in after him, and quickly closed the carriage door.

"Tolbiac was right after all," continued Piédouche. "But I didn't think the mute would have gone so easily—But still," he added between his teeth, "he arrived too late, Tolbiac, and he might have got himself into a fix and us, too—for suppose we had taken the other carriage for his?"

The coachman, who had his horse well in hand, lightly cracked his whip, and the brougham started off like an arrow, passing almost within touch of the two officers, and proceeding towards the Place de la Bastille by the Boulevard Mazas.

"Our task is finished," exclaimed Pigache. "We have now only to join the governor, and as he authorised us to take a hack at the expense of the administration, we won't wear out our shoes."

"Be quiet," said Piédouche, seizing him by the arm.

"Ah, zounds! what's that?" muttered No. 33.

The departure of the brougham which carried off the mute had unmasked the other brougham, the first to arrive, and this now came forward at a walk. A head appeared at the partly opened door, a head which strongly resembled that of M. Tolbiac de Tinchebray. Piédouche was asking himself if he were not the dupe of some optical illusion, when the horse—a black one—stopped. The man who was leaning out of the carriage now alighted, and began to look around him; he looked attentively towards the prison door. By his dress, his figure, and above all by his attitude of watchfulness, the two officers recognised the detective whom they had orders to second, and their wonder was unbounded.

Pigache did not yet thoroughly realise the situation, but Piédouche, blessed with a quicker understanding, began to suspect that they had just committed a terrible blunder. He wished to relieve his suspense, and so walked straight up to the gentleman standing by the brougham.

It was certainly Tolbiac, and he received his subordinates with these curt words, "I forbade you to leave your post. Return to it at once. Eight o'clock has struck. The mute will come out. He must not see you with me. Come, show me your heels. What are you waiting for?"

"The mute!" muttered Piédouche; "but—he has gone."

"What do you mean? He has gone? Are you going mad?"

"No, indeed. I tell you he got into the carriage which has just gone along the boulevard."

"And you let him do so, wretch!" exclaimed M. Tolbiac, catching the unfortunate detective by the collar of his coat and shaking him furiously.

"Let go of me," cried Piédouche, who appeared little disposed to allow himself to be roughly dealt with.

"Not till you have explained your conduct to me, you rascal!"

"Oh, no big words," retorted No. 29, disengaging himself quickly.

"You annoy me, in fact. If the mute has got away it is your fault, and not mine."

"What do you dare to say?"

"I say that, with all your inventions, it is you who caused the blunder. You should have driven up close to the door, the other carriage would not then have got in front of you."

"But you had seen mine—you had recognised it."

"Hardly. In the first place, your lamps gave a poor light; and then your coachman had taken off his fur collar. It is true that he has just put it on again; but he didn't have it on when he first came."

"You lie!"

"I don't lie. And I couldn't foresee that a carriage like yours would come past in front of you just as eight o'clock struck."

"I told you that I should be here at five minutes to eight, and I was, in fact."

"I don't say the contrary, but under other circumstances I should have prevented the mute from getting into the other brougham, which I could not do without falling upon him, and that was, as you well know, forbidden me."

"You knew that I was to alight and make a sign to the mute."

"Very well. A gentleman, who looked like you, and wore an overcoat like yours, went through all those same manœuvres. My comrade saw him as well as myself. It is funny, no doubt, but it is so."

"It is so funny," said M. Tolbiac, harshly, "that I summon you to explain it."

"Explain what?"

"Oh, don't act the stupid. You understand me very well, and you received the money for letting the mute escape."

"Well, now, for instance, that's a good joke!"

"How much did Father Lecoq give you to play the trick you have played here?"

"M. Lecoq! I haven't seen him since this morning."

"That will have to be proved. I assert that you are in collusion, and I declare to you that this will not finish here. They are waiting for us in the Rue du Mont-Thabor. You will both go there with me, and we will see how your chief will look at this matter."

"Yes, we shall see!" exclaimed Piédouche. "If there is any rascality about it, it is either you or I who have done it, and it must be known which of the two. The gov'nor will decide it." And, calling a passing cab, the officer added, in a firm tone: "I'm going to get into this vehicle with Pigache. If you are afraid I shall run away, you have only to follow me with your brougham. But rest easy: I sha'n't try to escape you on the way, for I am as anxious as you are to see this cleared up."

The detective felt, no doubt, that he couldn't do better than to accept this proposition. "So be it," he said. "I'll follow you; and, as my horse goes quicker than the one in that cab, I don't fear your escaping me. I would merely warn you that if your chief follows my advice, he will send you to prison this very evening as an accomplice of young Lecoq."

"We shall see," replied Piédouche, shrugging his shoulders. "But, since your horse goes so fast, you would have done as well to have ordered your coachman to follow the brougham which carried off the mute. You won't be able to prove that I prevented you from doing that, and you may be sure that I shall relate the affair to the gov'nor."

He then sprang into the cab with his comrade, while M. Tolbiac entered his brougham.

"We are in a nice scrape," said Pigache.

"I don't care," replied Piédouche, who seemed exasperated. "I have worked long enough with a fraud who promises me thousand-franc notes, and then wants to get me turned out by making me shoulder his blunders. So much the worse if the chief blames me."

Pigache was a philosopher and no chatterer, so the two officers did not exchange another word until the cab, escorted by M. Tolbiac's brougham, stopped in the Rue du Mont-Thabor.

Father Lecoq had not the patience to wait until the time appointed by the chief of the investigation service. He had come and posted himself opposite the house in which his son's fate was to be decided.

XLVII.

To apply the decisive test to which he wished to submit Louis Lecoq, the chief of the criminal investigation service had not considered it necessary to surround himself with the formalities usual in official inquiries. He had arrived at the Rue du Mont-Thabor in a cab, with the examining magistrate and the prisoner, without any escort.

A detective in plain clothes and two policemen awaited him in front of

the house. The first-named went up to the apartment with his chief, but the two policemen received orders to remain in the street and hold themselves in readiness for any emergency.

The programme proposed by M. Tolbiac had been followed step by step, Father Lecoq having merely introduced a modification in what personally concerned himself. Instead of going at ten o'clock to the chief's office, he had come as early as eight o'clock to the Ruc du Mont-Thabor and stationed himself in a dark corner in front of his son's residence.

He had seen the cab which brought his son pass by, the windows of the apartment had been lighted up, and the old man impatiently awaited the coming of the mute, intending to present himself before the chief when the latter left the house after the confrontation. He reckoned that his friend would excuse him for disregarding their agreement, and would not refuse to tell him the result of the interview. He even hoped, the poor father, that Louis would be surrendered to him after this interview, which would prove his innocence.

His heart beat tumultuously when M. Tolbiac's brougham stopped at No. 72, behind a cab which preceded it by a few yards. This was not the time for the old man to reveal himself, and he looked on from afar while the two detectives and M. Tolbiac alighted. He heard the door of the house close, and thought the mute had entered with them, for he could only imperfectly see who had left the vehicles. The brougham and the cab moved away and took up a position a short distance from the house, near the first cab, which had brought Louis and his two companions.

M. Lecoq raised his eyes toward the windows of the apartment where his son was about to play his great stake, and he soon saw shadows passing behind the curtains. He was well acquainted with this apartment, which he had taken so much pleasure in furnishing for his dear Louis, and by the movements of the shadows he could almost follow the exciting scene of the confrontation. "He is there," he said to himself, looking at the middle window; "they have left him in the sitting-room—they themselves are in the bedroom—and they watch him. The officers and Tolbiac have just entered the study. I see their shadows moving; they are about to push the mute into the sitting-room. Unless the unfortunate fellow makes some sign, they can mistake—Ah! I tremble when I think that my son's life depends on a gesture, on the expression of the face, of a being who is half an idiot." And he set to cursing Tolbiac, who had suggested the idea of this dangerous experiment.

"It is strange," he continued. "They remain in the study—and those who were in the bedroom are crossing the sitting-room. He comes to join them—one would fancy they were meeting together to talk. The scene was not arranged like this—what, then, has happened? Ah! the light grows dimmer in the study—they have closed the sitting-room door—they have lighted all the candles in the sitting-room, so that they may better see what effect the meeting with Louis will produce on the face of the mute—and they are in no hurry to reach that point. They have left Louis alone by himself—that is a good sign. If they thought him guilty they would not let him out of their sight."

M. Lecoq, reassured by this somewhat venturesome reflection, passed his hand across his forehead, on which great drops of perspiration were pearly, although the weather was so very cold. "Ah, my God!" he muttered, all at once. "It is he—he approaches the window—he draws aside the curtain and looks into the street. He doesn't know that his

father is here, the poor dear child. What is he thinking about? Of me—of his betrothed? God will not allow them to take him from us—and tomorrow, this evening, perhaps, I shall be able to embrace him—to conduct him to those who await him in such horrible anguish—more horrible than mine, for they are ignorant of what is taking place, while I hope—I am sure—that this terrible accusation will fall of itself, as soon as the mute—Ah! they are very long,” added the old man, striking his breast.

He was not at the end of his surprises. His son's shadow left the window, and the light was suddenly extinguished in the room where the conference, the object of which M. Lecoq did not suspect, had just taken place. A moment later the door of the house partly opened, a man glided into the street, and addressed a few words to the two police officers, one of whom at once went and ordered the vehicle which had brought the prisoner to advance. As soon as this cab was in front of the house, M. Lecoq heard the door opened, and by the oscillation of the vehicle he knew that several persons were getting into it. These several movements were executed with such remarkable celerity, that, before the old man had time to cross the street, the vehicle, which was one of those old-fashioned cabs, holding six people, started off in the direction of the Prefecture of police.

M. Lecoq no longer saw the police officers, nor the man who had spoken to them. While he was asking himself whether they had entered the house or gone away, the light which still illuminated two of the windows disappeared. The meeting was evidently at an end. Almost immediately afterwards three persons appeared on the sidewalk, whom M. Lecoq had no trouble in recognizing as the chief of the investigation service, the magistrate, and M. Tolbiac. After exchanging a few words they separated. The magistrate entered the cab which had been hired by Piédouche and Pigache, and Tolbiac went away in his brougham. The two vehicles started at the same time, and the chief, left alone, took his way slowly towards the Rue Castiglione.

M. Lecoq could not wish for a better opportunity for speaking to his old friend, so he ran to him and addressed him this one word:

“Well?”

“Ah! it's you,” replied the chief, coldly. “How is it you are here?”

“I had not enough patience to wait till you had returned to the Prefecture—you understand—I could not live. Where is my son? What has happened?”

“Don't you suspect?”

“No,” stammered the old man, astonished at this harsh, ironical tone.

“I saw Tolbiac arrive—the officers—the mute, but—”

“You cannot have seen the mute, for he did not come. He escaped—or, rather, he was carried off—abducted.”

“Abducted! Who abducted him?”

“You will oblige me very much by telling me, but I can tell you that I strongly suspect Piédouche of having been concerned in it.”

“He! I know him—he is incapable of betraying a trust.”

“We shall find that out within a few days' time, for I have just sent him to prison with his comrade, Pigache, and the two rogues will remain under lock and key until they have explained their conduct to me.”

“And my son?” asked M. Lecoq, trembling.

“Your son! I advise you to forget that you are his father, for you will never see him again. And I won't hide from you that you, yourself, may perhaps be held to answer for your acts,”

"Explain yourself—I don't understand."

"It is very clear, however. The confrontation with the mute was on the point of proving your son's guilt, as is now very well proved, for we have just discovered new evidence against him."

"What evidence?"

"You will understand that I cannot divulge to you the secrets of the investigation. Your son killed the man and woman in the Rue de l'Arbalète; we are absolutely sure of it. But the mute would have recognized him, and the mute has disappeared. Who was interested in having him disappear? You."

"I!" exclaimed M. Lecoq, indignantly. "I who reckoned on this interview to prove Louis' innocence. But you forget, then, that I was the first to ask you to bring him into the mute's presence."

"You knew, perhaps, that in asking that you risked nothing. When a man is rich and intelligent as you are, when a man like you has officers who are devoted to him, there need be no trouble in organizing an abduction."

"And so you accuse me," said the unfortunate father, sorrowfully. "You condemn my son."

"I don't accuse you, and it is not my business to condemn any one. But it is my duty to act without partiality against rascals—and against those who impede the action of justice. I have nothing further to say to you. I have been your friend, and the friendship I have had for you has cost me dear; our relations must now cease. Adieu!"

After this harsh conclusion, the chief of the investigation service quickened his pace and hurried away.

M. Lecoq, astounded, attempted neither to hold him back nor to justify himself. What did it matter to him if they accused him? It was his son he wished to defend, and he did not yet despair of saving him.

XLVIII.

A WEEK after the sad evening which had robbed Louis of his last hope, Father Lecoq was seated on a bench in the garden of the Tuileries, and the few persons walking about the grand avenue were surprised to see the old man resting, on a freezing February morning, in a place exposed to the full air. The last leaves detached by the north wind dropped on his bare head; the sharp gusts swept under his cloak, and still he remained there motionless, his eyes fixed, his arms crossed, without seeing the people who passed him with looks of compassion, and without seeming to feel the cold. The sparrows, accustomed to eat his bread, hopped round him, and twittered to themselves, "What is the matter with our friend? Why does he forget us!"

Alas! M. Lecoq had forgotten everything—everything except his son. He saw him incessantly; he followed him in his thoughts through every hour of that horrible prison life. Even at this moment, he was thinking that Louis was, perhaps, before the magistrate, who would succeed in entangling him in inextricable difficulties by questions adroitly put. "They hold him," he said to himself; "they won't let him go, and the poor child no longer has me to defend him. They have closed his prison door against me. The prefect has his eye on me. If the chief of the investigation service had not taken pity on me, I should be in jail;

Piédouche is there at all events. And they all think that I paid, I don't know whom, to abduct the mute. It is as though they accused me of having wished to assassinate my son. And if I took a step to assist him, if I investigated the affair on my side, gathered evidence, and brought witnesses, I should only succeed in ruining him while trying to save him. They watch me, and only yesterday I recognised one of my old officers following me on the quay. And what they are doing nobody knows. The proceedings are kept secret. The newspapers have orders not to say anything more about the affair of the Rue de l'Arbalète. They have announced that the murderer has been arrested—a rich young man, who had assumed a noble name, but whose real patronymic was simply Lecoq. And now they are silent—only each day they assert that the prosecution has discovered fresh evidence against the accused, and the public rejoices. They await the assizes—they already ask for admission cards—and then will come condemnation and La Roquette." The old man shuddered and hung his head, muttering: "They will condemn him; and I can do nothing—nothing."

"Good-morning, M. Lecoq," said a hoarse voice, timidly.

Louis' father quickly straightened himself, and saw Piédouche standing before him.

The poor devil had, indeed, the appearance of a man who had just left prison, and his dress indicated that his financial condition was no pleasant one. "Yes, patron, it's really I," he continued, on seeing that M. Lecoq seemed to hesitate about recognising him. "I can well call you patron, for I formerly served under you." And punctuating this sentence with a deep sigh, the ex-detective continued: "Besides, I have only you now, for they have driven me from the 'establishment.' And I spent a week in jail into the bargain, with a couple of examinations a day to make me tell what I didn't know. When they saw that they could draw nothing from me, they turned me out—it was yesterday morning—with a loaf under my arm, and eleven sous in my pocket. I gave the bread to the young'uns, and the eleven sous, on account, to the baker who had fed them while I was under lock and key. After that, I went to settle up at the Prefecture—ah, well, yes, no pay—dereliction of duty. Then I spouted my overcoat; and that's why you see me like this."

M. Lecoq listened to this somewhat disconnected discourse without saying a word; but he looked at Piédouche with eyes which seemed to search his inmost soul.

"You are angry with me," said ex-No. 29, in a voice full of emotion—"you are angry with me because I arrested your son. Ah! if it was to be done over again, or if I had only known it was he!"

"Why should I be angry with you?" muttered the old man.

"Truly? You forgive me?" exclaimed Piédouche. "Well, now, that consoles me for everything; for what troubled me the most was to think that I had given you pain without wishing to do so. Unfortunately, I can't undo this evil I caused by my foolishness."

"Perhaps you might," said M. Lecoq, slowly.

"Ah! if I thought that. Look here, patron. I am going to speak out while I am about it. You are right when you think that I was taken in like the others about M. Louis, and yet, at the beginning, I would have bet anything that it was he who struck the blow. Now, with my head under the knife of the guillotine, I would swear that he is white as snow."

"Will you help me to prove his innocence?"

"Will I? I should think so. Only, I must tell you that, on sending

me away, the chief let me know that if I meddled with any clues, investigations, or no matter what of that kind, he would send me to jail without trial. That makes me ask myself in what way I can be of any use to you.

"I can employ you without compromising you. Answer, in the first place, what I am about to ask you. Do you know what is being done in my son's affair?"

"Pigache dropped me a couple of words yesterday in the prison-yard. He was luckier than I, Pigache—they keep him—he got off with a loss of two weeks' pay, and he's still my friend. Well, he told me that the examination was going along rapidly—that they have found a pile of proofs."

"What are they?"

"Ah! patron, I'm afraid of grieving you."

"Don't be afraid. I can hear everything," said the old man, bitterly.

"Very well. It is rumoured that they have seized, in M. Louis' apartment, a cane with a loaded head which had spots of blood upon it, and which must have served in knocking down the old fellow who was found dead in the cottage dining-room. And, then, they talk about a letter from M. Louis—a letter addressed to the woman—a letter in which there are some threats—But with all that, they are seeking for the mute and can't find him. They have, however, written to all the prosecuting officers in France. But they say they will get along without him if they can't find him, as they have evidence enough to condemn M. Louis ten times over—and they want the affair to come before the assize in two months."

"Two months!" repeated M. Lecoq. "That is more time than is necessary." Then, leaving this idea, he exclaimed: "You were there when the abduction took place, and you know very well that I had nothing to do with it. Do you suspect any one?"

"Not precisely. Nevertheless, I was astonished that Tolbiac let himself be fooled so stupidly; and if the chief would have listened to me, it was not in your direction he would have looked. But he is infatuated with that animal there. A pretty fellow! Yes, let us talk about him, he passes all his time in hunting up inheritances, instead of working for the 'establishment.' Listen! On the evening of the abduction, in front of Mazas, man, who treated me to a glass of wine, related a strange story to me about him."

"Piédouche," said M. Lecoq, abruptly, "I proposed to you to take you with me; will you give yourself up without reserve? Do you feel that you have the courage to sacrifice everything for the object I have in view?"

"Willingly, patron—especially if I can be sure the little ones will have bread."

"I will see that they are placed with a good woman, who will care for them as though she was their mother."

"Oh, well, then I'm with you, patron, body and soul. If they are going to trouble me at the 'establishment,' Pigache will warn me. However, it all the same to me. I'm a citizen like any one else; and they have no right to trouble me when I do no wrong."

"Don't worry about the 'establishment.' We are going away."

"For long?"

"I don't know."

"And where to?"

"You have just told me that you were ready to serve me; you must serve me blindly, or not at all."

"You are right, sir. I forgot that for the moment, but it sha'n't happen again—and I'll follow you to China, if that will give you pleasure."

"Listen!" said M. Lecoq, quickly, as he rose from the bench on which Piédouche had seated himself by his side. "I don't know whether I shall go to Germany or England. It will be wherever I can collect evidence to overthrow this monstrous accusation. I don't know but what I shall hide myself in Paris, and fight them hand to hand, foot to foot; but I know this much—that my son is not guilty, and I will tear him from them. And now let us separate. They must not see us together again. Come to my house this evening at ten o'clock, and I will tell you what I expect of you."

With these words, the chief and the soldier separated, but from that moment the campaign began.

XLIX.

THREE months have elapsed; and in Paris three months mean a century. In three months everything is forgotten—even revolutions. The affair of the Rue de l'Arbalète, which had so greatly excited the great city during a couple of weeks in January, was already a matter of ancient history by spring time. One crime follows another, and criminals are not idle in Paris. They had not sat with their arms folded during the winter, and lovers of excitement were well served. The reporters did not know what assassin to turn to, and the newspapers had not space to contain all the exciting tales which these seekers after judicial news brought them daily. It is true they had discovered nothing so interesting as the cottage mystery, but people cannot live during a whole quarter of a year on the tragic death of a pretty woman and an old merchant, even though the woman be stabbed through a queen of spades.

The exposure of the body at the Morgue had ended without the victim being positively identified. It was known that the guilty party had been arrested, and the public reserved its curiosity for the great day when the prisoner would appear before the jury. Besides, the police had taken measures to promote silence respecting this mysterious affair. The head functionaries, usually so obliging to the Press, only furnished vague information on this subject, limiting themselves to stating that the investigation was advancing rapidly, and that everything would be revealed when the affair came before the assizes. So the contributors charged with judicial news being reduced to the hackneyed phrase, "justice investigates," remained waiting for the denouement of the drama now being played behind closed doors, and fell back upon other dramas of less interest which were still in their first act. The people of the fashionable world were, besides, more interested in the piece than in the actors. They were, at first, greatly interested in the mute, in the strange person who alone could have solved the enigma had he known how to speak; but then a mute can never be anything but a supernumerary, unless, as in the play of "Lazare le Pâtre," he suddenly recovers his speech and confounds the traitor. And the rumour having spread that this mute had disappeared, people had come to the conclusion that he had only played an accessory rôle, and thought no more about him.

Orders had been given to all the officials of the police department and the prisons to remain silent as to the circumstances connected with this strange escape, and outside of the Prefecture few people knew that the principal

witness was wanting in the investigation. As for the prisoner, he had, in certain respects, everything necessary to attract attention. By his education and social position, Louis Lecoq de Gentilly was assuredly not predestined to sit on the criminal bench, and he could not be confounded with professional assassins who kill to rob. But he was little known; he had appeared but seldom in Parisian drawing-rooms, and had been still less seen in resorts of pleasure. His name had never appeared among the *habitués* of first performances, and the "irregulars," who drive round the lakes in the Bois de Boulogne from four to six, had never heard of him. Moreover, he belonged to no club, nor did he associate intimately with young men destined, like himself, to the notarial profession. In a word, since an unexpected catastrophe had abruptly taken him from society, he had left no void either in the world of thought or pleasure. Madame and Mademoiselle Lecomte were also so situated that they attracted but little attention. The mother was exceedingly rich, and the daughter was charming; but riches and beauty remain perfectly ignored when they do not seek to be noticed.

Paris abounds in unknown millionaires and hidden marvels. There are people there with incomes of a hundred thousand francs who live as retired a life as they would in some country town. In this way, young people, those who are the best endowed by nature and their parents, often fail to attract notice in this immense capital, where so many dashing Americans and Russians cause a sensation by reason of a pretty figure or a semblance of wealth. Thérèse was one of those violets which wait to be discovered. She retreated into the shade of the maternal villa at the noise of the *fêtes* celebrated by fashionable journalists. Her marriage had been decided upon without the least stir, and a few old friends of the family were alone acquainted with the projected union, as the banker's widow had remained in retirement since her husband's death.

So Mademoiselle Lecomte's name had not been mentioned in connection with the arrest of her unfortunate lover, and the attractions of scandal seemed wanting in the *cause célèbre* of which Louis de Gentilly was destined to be the hero. As for Father Lecoq, he was certainly worthy of exciting curiosity among the readers of the *Gazette des Tribunaux*. It is not often that an old detective is personally connected with a criminal case, in which he barely escapes being called upon to bring his own son to the scaffold, and this novel situation was well calculated to rejoice the heart of a dramatist. But M. Lecoq, the true original detective, was only known to a few people who were not in the habit of admitting the public into the confidence of their friendships. The fame of the old detective had not spread through profane circles, and even the best informed journalists believed that Louis de Gentilly's father was merely an insignificant member of the middle classes. The people residing on the Quai Conti were on their side no better informed respecting the old gentleman who had lived for so many years in their peaceful neighbourhood. They only knew that the young man whom they saw pass every Sunday, giving his arm to M. Lecoq, had been arrested, and was accused of two murders. The father was greatly liked by his neighbours. They pitied him, and believed but little in his son's guilt; still, they began to think that he had given up the idea of defending him, for a few days after the arrest he had gone away, telling his concierge that he was starting on a rather long journey, and he had not since returned.

The officials at the Prefecture of police were excited over his absence. The chief of the criminal investigation service thought it inexplicable, for

he knew Lecoq well, and could not understand his abandoning an affair in which his son's head was at stake. M. Tolbiac explained it in his own way. He pretended that the good man had gone to join the mute, whom he had carried off to prevent the confrontation, and from this abrupt departure he drew certain conclusions not at all favourable to the accused. His opinion prevailed, and Father Lecoq was actively but unsuccessfully sought for. The most expert "blood-hounds" had their trouble for nothing; the old man was not to be found. It was supposed that he had left France to hide his grief and shame in some distant country, and that he would never be seen again.

Questioned respecting the disappearance of the man who was to have become Thérèse's father-in-law, Madame Lecomte merely replied that she knew nothing. Did she tell the truth? The chief of the investigation service doubted it, but he could not compel her to talk, and the inquiry ended there.

Nevertheless, the investigation, vigorously pushed and powerfully seconded by M. Tolbiac's intelligence and sagacity, had resulted in bringing together a number of proofs, sufficiently strong of themselves to render the mute's important testimony and more precise information respecting the victim, superfluous. The evidence was submitted to the *Chambre des Mises en Accusation*, which returned an indictment to the court of assize; and one day in April it became known that the murderer of "the queen of spades woman" would be tried at the close of that lovely month when the lilies commence to bloom.

The Parisians, with the assistance of politics, had almost forgotten this terrible affair, but the morning and evening newspapers were careful to recall the exciting circumstance to their minds. There was at once a renewal of curiosity, which was taken full advantage of, the most extraordinary tales being circulated concerning Louis Lecoq, *alias* De Gentilly. The papers made him a Don Juan and an Othello, a Fra Diavolo and a Lovelace—handsome, proud, gloomy, and jealous; and some of them attributed enough adventures to him to have furnished the plots of half-a-dozen novelettes. And soon there was no longer a woman in France who did not dream of being present at the judicial struggle of this poetic assassin. Thérèse and her mother had, alas! no need to solicit the sad favour of witnessing his trial. They were summoned by the public prosecutor, who required their testimony to prove that the accused was no longer in their company at the time the crime was committed.

L.

ON the appointed day, in the latter part of April—a mild spring morning—the assize court was thronged with an elegant, privileged crowd. Never indeed did a favourite dramatist attract a more select assemblage to the first performance of a new play. All Paris was there—the Paris of the clubs, drawing-rooms, and race-courses. Notorious women elbowed distinguished financiers. The Academy was represented, and political celebrities were not wanting. Of course, the army of reporters was present in full strength, reinforced by several editors and writers on social topics, not to mention popular playwrights and successful novelists. The prettiest actresses had intrigued to obtain seats, and by special favour, behind the bench there were stowed away some foreigners of distinction, the most con-

spicuous of whom was an Indian nabob, a majestic old man, richly dressed in Oriental style. This exotic noble wore a long, white beard, which hid three parts of his swarthy face. A servant, the colour of ebony, stood erect at three paces behind him, and attracted almost as much attention as his master from the inquisitive public. All the opera-glasses were turned towards them while waiting to be levelled at the accused.

After waiting for twenty minutes, a small door opened in front of the seats set apart for the jury, and a tremor of excitement darted through the assemblage. Louis Lecoq entered, followed by two guards, and sat down without looking at this multitude, which swayed to and fro in its endeavours to see him. He was dressed in black from head to foot, and appeared to be quite calm, although very pale.

When he had taken his place, he leaned forward to say a few words to his counsel—an illustrious barrister, who had solicited and obtained the favour of defending him—and then resting his arm on the bar of the dock, with his head in his hands, he remained as motionless as a statue.

The beautiful ladies who hoped to read signs of emotion on the culprit's face were altogether disappointed, as M. Lecoq did not seem to realise that his head was at stake. His manner was that of a well-bred man waiting to be received in a drawing-room, but his ease and haughtiness of bearing were interpreted against him. Those who congregate at a criminal trial like to witness the culprit's agony, and the prisoner pleases them when he appears troubled. Thus the spectators readily take self-possession for impudence, and resignation for insensibility. They found that this handsome fellow did not sufficiently humiliate himself, and they would have liked to have seen him weep.

If those who reproached him with not realizing the horror of his situation could have read his heart, they would have been more indulgent. The unfortunate young man was really suffering horrible martyrdom, and made superhuman efforts to hide his sufferings. It was not the scaffold he feared, but the anguish which would necessarily be inflicted upon him while on the felon's bench. He knew that Thérèse had been cited as a witness; that she would see him bowed down under the unmerciful words of an indignant accuser; and hear him answer the questions put to him by a judge who would not consider it his duty to show consideration for an assassin. Still more, he surmised that this judge would speak to him of his love for her and of their marriage, prevented by a horrible fatality; that to draw a confession from him, he would show him his betrothed in tears; and his heart ached at the mere thought of involuntarily inflicting such tortures upon the young girl whom he still loved as warmly as on the day when they first pledged their mutual faith.

During his long confinement in a cold cell at Mazas, Thérèse's image had never left his thoughts; she haunted his dreams; and the bitter remembrance of his happiness, gone never to return, tortured him night and day. How often he had wished to die, rather than submit to the shame of a public trial! How often he had said to himself that his betrothed could no longer think of him but with horror and contempt! For three months he had lived in complete isolation, and had not been released from so called "secret" confinement until a week before the commencement of the assizes. On questioning him as to the escape of the mute, the investigating magistrate had been obliged to inform him that Father Lecoq had disappeared, and that he was suspected of having favoured the escape. But when Louis inquired about Mademoiselle Lecomte, when he asked permis-

son to write to her, the officials replied that it was impossible, for she was to be called as a witness, and so he had heard nothing respecting her.

He had submitted to all this without complaint. Despair sustained his energy; he anticipated the worst, and was prepared for it. If he struggled on to the end, it was because honour required that he should not acknowledge himself vanquished, even after he had heard his death-sentence. So he took with him to the trial the courage of the soldier who marches to certain death, and the expression of pride which this resolution imparted to his face astonished and shocked many of those who witnessed it.

Still the women were not precisely hostile to him. They supposed that violent passions had led him to commit the crime he was charged with, and they credited him with having loved. Perhaps they would have been less indulgent had he not been good-looking; but Louis Lecoq had lost none of his physical advantages by his imprisonment. His pallor added to the air of distinction that was natural to him, and the dark rings round his big black eyes, caused by his sufferings, made their brilliancy still more conspicuous.

Before the entrance of the jury and the judges some minutes elapsed, during which the crowd exchanged their opinions in whispers, the murmur of which did not seem to trouble the accused, for he was still impassive. They could no longer see his face, but they looked at the articles to be used as evidence, which were lying on a large table in the well of the court, and there were some among them, which were indeed worth looking at. Beside a cane, with a knob of burnished steel, and which, according to the prosecution, was used in felling M. Lheureux, one could see some plaster casts exactly reproducing the foot-prints made in the snow on the night of the crime at the cottage. Still, further, there were the ivory-handled dagger and the queen of spades, fastened by the assassin to the victim's bosom; the stand on which the game of patience was found in the prisoner's apartment; the woman's dress, trimmed with lace, and stained with blood; her rose-coloured slippers, and the faded camellia.

But the object which attracted the most attention was a wax bust of the unfortunate creature whom many remembered having seen at the Morgue. This bust bore a marvellous resemblance to the original, and it was so beautifully executed that it appeared to have come from the hand of one of those old masters in wax-work, whose art, so flourishing in the seventeenth century, is to-day so much neglected. The effect was astonishing, but it is right to say that this masterpiece had not been exhibited for the purpose of exciting the admiration of inquisitive folks, but in the hope that it might serve to identify the dead woman, who had not as yet been identified at all.

Chance might bring a foreigner, an Englishman, to the trial, and as it was certain she was English, it was hoped this image might cause one of those incidents which—as they say at the theatre—would bring down the house. And, in fact, to most people an Assize Court is a theatre. Only, in this case, the finish of the play would have to be postponed until another performance—that is to say, till a future session of the jury; and among the people present there were many who had only come to enjoy the scene of a death-sentence, pronounced, as is the custom, by lamplight. These spectators made vows to be kept providing Louis Lecoq's fate was decided at that day's sitting. It is not every day that one has the opportunity of seeing an elegant young man turn pale, and shudder on hearing the presiding judge read, with becoming emotion, the terrible Article 302 of the Penal Code.

The women especially were anxious not to lose anything of such an agreeable spectacle.

They did not have to wait long for the curtain to rise, for an usher speedily announced : "The Court ! hats off ! stand up !"

The judges entered, and the jurymen took their places. Silence reigned; a profound silence, which added still more to the solemnity of the scene.

"Prisoner at the bar, stand up," said the presiding judge.

The accused was already standing. He stood fully erect with raised head.

"What is your name ?"

"Louis Albert Lecoq."

"You have often taken another name—a name you had no right to bear?"

"That was the name by which my father was known."

"That may be so ; let us pass on. Your age ?"

"Twenty-eight years."

"Where were you born ?"

"At Paris."

"Your profession ?"

"Doctor of laws."

"You are accused of having, in the month of January last, committed a double murder. Sit down, and listen to the reading of the indictment."

Louis Lecoq obeyed, and the clerk commenced to read, in a clear voice, the following summary of the terrible charges brought against poor Thérèse's lover.

LI.

"DURING the night of the 12th and 13th January last, toward three o'clock in the morning, two police officers, belonging to one of the brigades of the Thirteenth Arrondissement of Paris, arrested, at the corner of the Rue Corvisart and the Rue du Champ de l'Alouette, an individual carrying a large trunk. He was suspected of having stolen it, and was taken to the station-house, no attention being given to a man who preceded the porter by a few steps, and who went away in the direction of the Boulevard d'Italie. The trunk was opened by order of the sergeant in charge of the station, and was found to contain the corpse of a young and beautiful woman, who had been struck at the heart with a dagger. The weapon was left in the wound. It had pierced a playing-card which had been placed by the assassin upon the bosom of his victim, as though he wished to leave his signature to his abominable work. On being questioned at once, the individual arrested made known by signs that he was a deaf mute, and it was ascertained that such was the fact. Justice could still less expect an explanation of the affair from him, as he appeared to have merely played a passive rôle, and was, perhaps, an unconscious agent.

"On the following day, however, the skilful measures adopted by the chief of the criminal investigation department resulted in the discovery that the crime had been committed in the Rue de l'Arbalète, in a house occupied for a few months only by the murdered woman. It can even be determined in which room the woman, whose identity cannot be stated, but who appears to be English, was struck. At the same time, in a pantry adjoining the luxuriously furnished dining-room, the officers found the body of M. Lheureux, a merchant, who had been killed by the use of a blunt instrument.

"These two crimes could have had but a single author, as the one was evidently but the consequence of the other, and the assassin proposed to

dispose of the two bodies in the same manner. The murders were not committed for the purpose of robbery, for nothing of value was carried off. No traces were discovered indicating that the premises had been forcibly entered, so that the assassin must have been known to the tenant of the house, who voluntarily opened the door for him.

"This tenant, according to all appearances, carried on an immoral connection with the murdered merchant, and if this connection cannot be established, it is because the two victims were equally interested in keeping it secret. The merchant was married, and the father of a family; the English woman had a lover whom she deceived. This lover having surprised her taking supper with his rival, revenged himself by killing them both.

"The prosecution had at first admitted another hypothesis. It had thought that the murder of M. Lheureux had been committed by the lover and his mistress in concert, the latter being subsequently stabbed by her accomplice. But the merchant carried about him valuables of importance which were found intact, and no draft indorsed by him has been presented either at his bank or to any of his correspondents. It is therefore very probable that these crimes had no other motives than jealousy and revenge.

"But however that may be, it is shown that the accused alone can have committed them. The son of a man who amassed a handsome fortune in an occult, if not an unavowable profession, Louis Lecoq received a brilliant education, at first in England, where he spent several years, then in Germany, and finally in France, where he obtained the degrees of licentiate and doctor of laws. He chose the career of a notary, and was on the point of purchasing a practice and of marrying a young person belonging to a most honourable family, when he was arrested by a truly providential circumstance.

"The proofs of his guilt abound. In the first place, a pocket-book belonging to him, and which he admitted to be his property, was found to contain a portrait of the murdered woman—a portrait representing her engaged in playing a game of cards called patience. This portrait, the only proof taken from the negative by a well-known Paris photographer, who recognized it, and who has sworn to the fact, bears in the handwriting of the victim an inscription which leaves no doubt as to the character of Lecoq's connection with the murdered woman. The portrait was given to him by this woman to remind him of a *liaison* in which the game of patience played a part.

"Moreover, the authorities seized, in a secret closet at the prisoner's residence, a pack of cards, arranged on a table in the same style as the photograph. One of them was missing, and this was proved to be the same as was pierced by the dagger—namely, the queen of spades.

"Lecoq attempted to explain the coincidence by various allegations, the falseness of which was at once perceived. Besides this, material proofs have been discovered which show him to be guilty. It is established that he entered the cottage in the Rue de l'Arbalète during the night of the 13th and 14th of January—the night following the crime. He was not arrested owing to a succession of unfortunate circumstances by which he succeeded in evading the officers who watched the house. Later on these officers recognised him, not by his face, which he had been careful to hide, but by his voice and certain details of his attire. Moreover, on the same night, in view of obtaining permission to pass, he exhibited a detective's card; and, by his own confession, it is known that he had had in his possession a card

belonging to his father, who was formerly attached to the criminal investigation service.

"A cane with a loaded-head was seized at the prisoner's residence and is held as evidence against him, for its knob bears traces of blood. This cane evidently enabled him to deal the blow which crushed the skull of M. Lheureux.

"In the cottage in the Rue de l'Arbalète the authorities moreover found an envelope bearing the name of Mary Fassitt, and the post-mark of the office on the Place du Théâtre-Français. The address is in the handwriting of the prisoner, whose office was but a short distance from that post-office.

"Finally, he was unable to account for the employment of his time during the nights of the 12th and 13th and 14th of January, and the magistrate who investigated this grave affair received from a person, who did not state his name, a letter which is entirely written by Lecoq, and the contents of which are equivalent to a confession. The double crime perpetrated in the Rue de l'Arbalète is foretold in this missive in the form of a threat to Mary Fassitt and in the clearest and most explicit terms.

"To this accumulation of overwhelming evidence the accused opposes mere denials, contradicted by facts and testimony alike. He generally takes refuge in self-condemnatory silence, or when he speaks it is only to complain that he was not confronted with the deaf-mute who was arrested while carrying the trunk containing the corpse of the murdered woman. The confrontation which he demands so persistently cannot take place, on account of a series of highly regrettable incidents. The deaf-mute escaped immediately on being released from Mazas, for the purpose of being brought into Lecoq's presence. Neither his name nor residence is known, and in spite of the most active efforts he has not been found. It was Father Lecoq, assisted by an unfaithful officer, who brought about this escape. He has gone abroad with the officer he corrupted, and his flight alone furnishes superabundant evidence that the accused is guilty. In fact, Father Lecoq undertook to demonstrate his son's innocence. He may perhaps have believed in it at first, but it is because he no longer believed in it at a later stage in the proceedings, because he knew that the mute would unfailingly recognise Louis Lecoq, that he promoted the disappearance of this compromising witness.

"But justice cannot allow itself to be baffled by an audacious act, the object of which was to prevent the truth from being brought to light. The perpetrator of the massacre in the Rue de l'Arbalète ought not to benefit by the guilty acts of his father. It is due to society that the punishment of a murderer should not be delayed, and that the victims of an abominable crime should be promptly avenged. The murderer who did not fear to strike a defenceless old man, and cowardly stab a mistress, who, perhaps, had loved him, is Louis Lecoq.

"The facts have been revealed; and it remains to describe the man. Of late years his conduct has been regular, and he has no bad antecedents, or, at least, it does not appear he has committed any reprehensible act since his return to France. He seems to have been prompt and attentive in his professional duties, his pecuniary position was good, and he was on the eve of marrying very advantageously. It may even be asked whether the fear of a rupture of this marriage, which would certainly have followed the discovery of his immoral connection with the woman he murdered, did not drive him to rid himself of her. That is for the jury to consider.

"But if Lecoq was neither openly a debauchee nor a dissipated character,

it is notorious that he had no friends ; that he did not frequent society ; that he did not seek any of the pleasures customary to those of his age—in a word, that he led a solitary and almost mysterious life. Finally, he has always manifested a violent disposition and considerable powers of dissimulation. Such a man could have well prepared and perpetrated the two crimes of the Rue de l'Arbalète. In consequence of which, Lecoq (Louis Albert) is accused of having," etc., etc., etc.

LII.

THE reading of the indictment was listened to by the jury and the public with the greatest attention. The nabob himself did not lose a word of it, for he understood French perfectly.

Louis Lecoq, however, listened with such an air of indifference as to astonish the oldest *habités* of the court. One would have sworn that he was in no way concerned in the matter.

He again stood up at the request of the presiding judge, who said to him : "The charges against you are very serious. You will dispute them in course of the trial ; but I must ask you, in the first place, if you persist in denying all participation in the crimes of which you are accused ?"

"Absolutely," replied Louis Lecoq, in a firm voice.

"Then it is my duty to call your attention to the fact that you have adopted a bad course, and you will soon realise it. The prosecution affirms, and maintains it is able to prove, that you are the perpetrator of these two execrable murders, but it abstains from specifying the motives which led you to commit them. You are too intelligent not to realise that your guilt will be aggravated or diminished according to the cause of the crimes. For instance, if it were established that you struck M. Lheureux and Mary Fassitt in a fit of anger you would certainly be more excusable than if you had killed them with premeditation."

"I have no excuse to offer. I am innocent ; that is all."

This answer, given in an artless manner, produced a deep impression.

"It was in your interest that I begged of you to change your course," continued the presiding judge. "Perhaps you will regret not having followed my advice. I now invite you to frankly answer the questions I am about to put to you. They ought not to embarrass you since you are innocent. At what period did you return to France ?"

"Six years ago."

"You came from Germany ?"

"Yes, sir ; from Heidelberg, where I studied at the University."

"Did you not assiduously frequent the house of a professor of theology there ?"

"Yes. I asked for the hand of his daughter, and obtained it, but my father objected to the marriage."

"We will return to this point presently. Before you went to Germany, you lived in England ?"

"Yes ; for several years."

"Then you speak English ?"

"Perfectly."

"What were your relations in England ?"

"Those which a boy of sixteen may have at a boarding school, where more liberty is granted than is enjoyed by collegians in France. I was re-

ceived by the families of some well-to-do farmers living in the neighbourhood."

"You even tried to persuade the daughter of one of these farmers to elope with you."

"That is true, sir."

"What was her name?"

"Georgiana Smith."

"Exactly; but did you not at the same time know either in London, or in the suburbs of London, a woman named Mary Fassitt?"

"No, sir. If you refer to the woman who was killed in the Rue de l'Arbalète, I beg of you to remember that twelve years have elapsed since I left England. Twelve years ago that woman must have been a child."

"Indeed you ought to know pretty well how old she was when she was killed, since you went to the Morgue to see her corpse."

"I have never denied that," said the accused, without the least embarrassment.

"Let us pass on," continued the judge. "You returned to France during the year of the war; you enlisted, and behaved gallantly during the campaign. Finally, you were on the point of marrying a young girl belonging to a very honourable family?"

Louis Lecoq gave a nod of assent, but did not reply, and the curious fair ones who watched him thought they could perceive that he became rather paler.

"What sort of a life have you led in Paris?" asked the judge.

"A somewhat retired one. I do not care for society, so I frequented it but little. I was, besides, very much occupied, and I devoted all my leisure moments to my father."

"One moment! you did, indeed, spend your Sundays with your father, but what did you do with your evenings during the week?"

"It often happened that I returned to the office after dinner. When I was not obliged to do so, I went home and worked."

"At your age that is hardly probable, and, besides, your concierge has sworn that, since the end of last summer, you often came home after midnight."

"I went sometimes to the theatre."

"I admit that; but you will allow that it is surprising you never otherwise employed the time at your disposal in the evening. The prosecution affirms that you spent it in the Rue de l'Arbalète."

"The prosecution is mistaken. Recently I passed my evenings at Boulogne."

"At Madame Lecomte's. That point is not contested. But you often left there at ten o'clock—sometimes before. Thus, on the evening of the 13th of January, you left there at half-past nine?"

"That is possible."

"What did you do after that?"

"I took the tram-way, which dropped me at the Place de la Concorde, and I then walked home."

"It is difficult to prove that you are not telling the truth. Your concierge's recollection is not sufficiently precise for him to contradict you, but he remembers perfectly well that on the next day, Sunday, the 14th of January, you reached home at a very late hour of the night."

"That is true. My father had dined with me at Madame Lecomte's. I went with him to the Quai Conti, where he lived, and I returned on foot to

the Rue du Mont-Thabor, making the tour of the Rue Montmartre, the boulevards, and the Rue de la Paix."

"You chose a bad time for your walk. It was very cold that night, and snowed."

"I had a headache. and felt the need of fresh air."

This reply produced a slight murmur among the audience, and the presiding judge gently rejoined: "The prosecution maintains that you went to the Rue de l'Arbalète, that you entered the cottage at midnight, and that, surprised by the officers placed there on guard, you escaped from them by exhibiting a detective's card. Now, you acknowledged before the examining magistrate, that you had had your father's card in your possession, he having formerly belonged to that service."

"I did, indeed, find that card among my father's papers and took it, but I burned it. It is useless to explain to you why I hastened to do so."

"In point of fact, the respectable family which you were on the point of entering, were ignorant of the fact that you are the son of an ex-detective. You were, then, interested in destroying an article which recalled your father's past life. It might, however, be objected that it was impossible for this article ever to fall into the hands of Madame Lecomte or of her daughter. In addition to this, the officers who watched the cottage positively recognised you. One of them has not replied to the summons. He has disappeared since the mute's escape; an escape in which he certainly co-operated."

"But the chief of the criminal investigation department will be heard, and other witnesses will attest that you went more than once to the house of the murdered woman. There is, besides, a material proof against you, and the time has arrived to submit it to the judgment of the jury. Usher; take the plaster moulds and place them upon the floor," added the judge. Then turning to the jury, "Gentlemen," he said, "these prints were taken from the fresh snow which covered the ground in the yard in front of the cottage. The first two are those of the footsteps of the deaf-mute who carried the trunk and of the individual who accompanied him. The third exactly reproduces the steps of the man who entered the house in the Rue de l'Arbalète at midnight, on the day after the crime. The traces left during the first night, at first seemed inexplicable, for they all went towards the cottage. It seemed as though the persons who left them had entered the cottage but had not returned; but it is now evident that on going away the assassin and his accomplice the deaf-mute, took the precaution to walk backwards. But the assassin did not take this precaution on the next night, as he was in a hurry to escape. Prisoner, advance and put your right foot into the two moulds which the usher shews you."

LIII.

LOUIS LECOQ left the dock without the least hesitation, and advanced toward the moulds. The public evinced great curiosity and all the women stood up; they wished to see if the murderer had a pretty foot. The nabob, who followed the trial with unflagging attention, also rose so as to watch this test.

"That large foot-print, gentlemen of the jury," said the presiding judge, "is that of the deaf-mute. The other one, much smaller, was left by the man who accompanied him. Lecoq, make the test."

Thérèse's betrothed placed his right foot, a narrow, well-shaped, well-booted foot, into the plaster mould. It entered easily, and seemed to have plenty of room. There was a murmur favourable to the accused, and the jury seemed to be impressed in the same way.

"Now try the other," continued the judge.

This time the young man's foot seemed to fit the mould almost exactly.

"I would remark to the gentlemen of the jury," said the public prosecutor, "that the foot-prints may vary in size, according as one walks more or less heavily, or more or less quickly. On the first night the assassin took his time. The second, he was in a hurry."

"For my part," replied the prisoner's counsel, "I have to state that a very perceptible difference exists between these foot-prints. They were not made in the snow by the foot of the same individual."

"The jury will judge of that," said the judge, while the accused returned to his former place. "Let us pass to another matter," he continued. "You pretend that the portrait of the murdered woman did not belong to you, that a thief, arrested at the Morgue, put it into your pocket-book, which he had just stolen. How do you explain the words written on the back of this photograph? There is 'Forget-me-not.' The gentlemen of the jury know that these words mean, '*Ne m'oubliez pas.*'"

Several of the jury nodded their heads to make the public think that they understood English.

"Those words were not addressed to me," replied the accused, calmly.

"It is very strange that the woman had herself represented as playing a game called 'patience,' and that at your residence this same game was found spread out on a table in a secret room. And that is not all. The woman holds a queen of spades in her hand. The queen of spades is missing from the pack you preserved so preciously—it was found pinned to the victim's heart."

"I explained these coincidences to the examining magistrate."

"Yes; you pretended that, during your stay in Germany, you played patience with a young girl with whom you were smitten, and that as a reminder of this love affair (which ought to have been well forgotten, since you were going to marry Mademoiselle Lecomte), you preserved these cards arranged in the same order. That is a very unlikely and very puerile explanation."

"Less puerile than an accusation which depends upon a fact of such trivial importance," said Lecoq, earnestly.

"Unfortunately for you, a letter was sent to Heidelberg, and the father of the young girl you loved denies your assertion."

"This young girl has married a Prussian officer since the war. It is quite natural that she no longer wishes to remember me."

This reply, made in a most natural tone, produced the best effect.

The presiding judge made no rejoinder, but, after turning over some papers, he resumed: "The cane which was seized at your residence bears traces of blood on the knob. It is evident that you used it to strike M. Lheureux. The doctors who examined the wound affirm it."

"I never saw M. Lheureux."

"Perhaps, indeed, you never did see him till you met him at your mistress's. And it is easy to suppose that on surprising him seated at the table, taking supper with her, you were seized with a violent fit of anger. The scene which followed can be imagined. You threw yourself upon him, and he defended himself. Traces were found of a desperate struggle.

You were younger and more vigorous than he; you pushed him as far as the door of the pantry, and there, disengaging yourself from his hold, you struck him a blow on the head—only one.”

Louis Lecoq did not reply. For the first time since the commencement of the examination, he lost his impassibility.

“Speak,” said the judge, perceiving his trouble. “Was it not thus that the events occurred?”

Lecoq still remained silent.

“Come now, you are perhaps not as guilty as the prosecution maintains. Your rival may have grossly insulted you, have slapped you in the face. You are quick and excitable; the outrage you received made you lose all self-control. A struggle followed—a struggle you had not provoked—and finally, losing all control over yourself, you used your cane. You killed, but you did not wish to kill.”

All eyes were fixed upon the prisoner, who held his head down; and when he raised it again for a moment, one might have thought he was going to confess. However, he replied with an effort: “I repeat to you, sir, that I have never seen M. Lheureux.”

A murmur ran through the audience, and the judge continued, in his solemn, gentle voice: “You persevere in the deplorable course you have adopted. I warn you once more that you injure your cause, for the proofs I still have to exhibit to the gentlemen of the jury are overwhelming, and, by stating the truth, you might perhaps have won their indulgence. Here is an envelope addressed to Mary Fassitt. This address is in your handwriting.”

“No, sir,” replied Louis Lecoq, dryly.

“Usher, pass this envelope to the jury for comparison with this other paper, which certainly bears the handwriting of the accused.”

While these papers circulated, the public whispered, exchanging opinions which were generally unfavourable to poor Thérèse's lover. His youth, his attitude and language, had at first won for him certain sympathies which the test with the plaster moulds had only served to strengthen. But the obstinate silence he had opposed to the judge's feeling appeal was interpreted as a partial confession, and opinion had now turned against him.

“The evidence of various experts in hand-writing will be heard,” said the judge, when the usher returned him the papers which had been examined by the jury. And addressing the prisoner, and showing him a paper, he added: “Here is a letter which you acknowledge having written.”

“Yes, I acknowledge it,” said Louis Lecoq, earnestly, “but I—”

“You will make your explanations after I have read it. I beg the gentlemen of the jury to be attentive. The whole affair is explained here.”

And the judge commenced to read: “My dear Mary—” The letter, gentlemen,” he said, “is in French, but the name, Marie, is spelt in the English way—Mary. This name is that of the murdered woman, and it was evidently to that same woman that the accused wrote what you are about to hear: ‘My dear Mary:—I love you with all the strength of my soul. I have proved it to you, and I swear to you again that I shall always love you. Why do you torment me as you do? Why do you refuse to fly with me? Is it because you don't belong entirely to me, and that you divide your heart? It is all very well for you to tell me that you are not free—that you have duties to fulfil. What are duties when one loves? I also have duties, and I forget them for you. Do you think that my father would approve of it if he knew that I am resolved to devote my life to you?’

But this man who influences you—this man whom you fear and I hate, what are his claims upon you? Who obliges you to sacrifice me for him?

“‘I have lost all patience and courage. Have pity on me. Consent to fly. The existence you have led me for several months has become intolerable. Put an end to my sufferings, I beseech you, in the name of our love. If you do not listen to my prayer, Mary—if you refuse to fly from the tyranny of this scoundrel, you will compel me to commit a crime. Ah! you did well to prevent my meeting with you, for if I had found him in my way, I should have killed him, and I will kill him if you remain under his domination.’”

“‘But no, you will throw off the yoke, and we will fly together. What have you to fear? If he dared to follow you, should I not be there to protect you? And he cannot leave his country, his business, as you well know. Shall we leave three days from now? Shall I come for you in the evening at the time he leaves? Say yes, and in three days we shall meet, never to part again. Your reply, which I await in anguish, will decide our fate. Better die a hundred times—better see you dead at my feet, than give you up.’”

“This letter is signed ‘Louis,’” continued the judge, after reading it slowly, and emphasizing certain passages. “Prisoner, what have you to say?”

LIV.

“THAT letter certainly came from me,” replied Louis Lecoq, “but I wrote it several years ago.”

“To whom?”

“To a woman I then loved.”

“Name her.”

“I cannot.”

“Why?”

“Because it would compromise her.”

Exclamations and incredulous laughter arose from different parts of the court. However, the usher called for silence, and the judge continued, in a tone of increasing severity: “You do not expect, I suppose, that the jury and court will admit any such explanation after what we have just listened to. This letter agrees in every point with the double crime of the Rue de l’Arbalète; it foretells it, and it almost describes it. Mary—that is the unfortunate woman you killed. The man under whose domination she was, was M. Lheureux, whom you also killed, because you hated him as a rival—because you surprised him with your mistress, to whom you had written: ‘I shall kill him if I meet him!’ The gentlemen of the jury will not forget the passage. As for the projected flight, Mary was about to put it into execution. Her trunks were packed; and her waiting-maid had already gone. But it was you whom Mary wished to flee from. She had resolved to return to England to escape from your persecution, from the violence with which you constantly threatened her. She had confided her fears to the man who protected her; she had apprized him of her departure, and he had come to spend the last evening with her. On his person the prosecution found a note, in which she told him that she should expect him at ten o’clock. You arrived just as M. Lheureux was taking supper with Mary. You were carried away by jealousy. A quarrel takes place; and it ends in a murder. And then, intoxicated with fury and a

longing for revenge, you dragged away the unfortunate woman and stabbed her. This card, which you fastened upon her bosom, was a souvenir of her former vows. You showed it to Mary, and reproached her for her disloyalty. You charged her with thinking of your rival when she began this game in which she read presages of happiness, and in your rage you pierced at one blow the card and her heart. It was really thus, was it not, that the two crimes were committed?"

Louis Lecoq was very pale, but he did not cast down his eyes as he replied, in a firm voice: "I swear before God that I did not kill Mary Fassitt."

A death-like silence followed this reply. The public no longer murmured; it was convinced. The jury's verdict was still to be heard, but the prisoner was already condemned.

To lessen the effect of this scene as much as possible, the prisoner's counsel rose, and asked the judge to be pleased to state that this letter was received by the public prosecutor from an unknown source. He added: "I beg the gentlemen of the jury to notice that with the theory which has been unfolded to them, it is impossible to explain how my client could have taken the precaution to bring a trunk to carry away the corpse, since he could not have foreseen the scene which this meeting with M. Lheureux caused in the opinion of the prosecution. It is not admissible either that he came with the deaf-mute who—"

"You will make use of these arguments when you plead," interrupted the judge. "I ought, however, to remind you that the trunk belonged to Mary Fassitt, and to tell you that Lecoq may have gone after the deaf-mute after committing the crimes. Accused, have you anything further to add?"

"Nothing, sir," replied Lecoq, simply.

"You can sit down. We will now hear the witnesses."

The usher called them. There were but few, the prosecution having only summoned those it could not dispense with; on his side, the prisoner had summoned none. The only one whose testimony he could have invoked—the deaf-mute—had disappeared.

The first to be heard was the chief of the criminal investigation service, who spoke with great moderation, but was very positive on a very important point. He declared that he and his subordinates, and particularly the one who had disappeared, had perfectly recognised Louis Lecoq as the man who, on the night of the day following the crime, came to the cottage in the Rue de l'Arbalète.

The coal-dealer and his wife did not speak as positively. They had, they said, seen a well-dressed gentleman, who resembled the accused, call several times at the cottage, but they were not sure that the gentleman was the prisoner.

The English pickpocket, on his side, swore that he did not know Mary Fassitt, and that he had put nothing into the pocket-book—which could not be doubted. After him various witnesses of no importance appeared: tradesmen who had had dealings with the lady at the cottage, and who knew very little about her; two friends of M. Lheureux, respectable merchants, who confined themselves to praising the deceased's commercial probity, and protesting that they had never had the least suspicion of his *liaison* with Mary Fassitt; the photographer who had taken her portrait; the collector of taxes, who had received the amount of the taxes due on the cottage from England; the concierge of the Rue du Mont-Thabor, who

asserted that his tenant returned home at two o'clock in the morning on the Sunday following the crime, and that he had never received any women at his apartment. Then came a string of medical experts, furnishing skilful explanations respecting the wounds received by the victims, and the time which had elapsed between their last repast and their death; professors of handwriting who discoursed learnedly on up strokes and down strokes, and proved in an arbitrary way that the address on the envelope found at Mary Fassitt's residence was certainly in Lecoq's handwriting.

A letter was read from the principal of the English boarding-school where the accused had commenced his studies. The master said that young Lecoq, during his stay with him, had been guilty of numerous escapades, and had tried to seduce the daughters of various gentlemen living in the neighbourhood. An answer was also read from the professor at Heidelberg, who indignantly refuted the allegations of the prisoner, and formally denied that his daughter Bettina had ever played at patience with him, or been engaged to him.

Finally, Mademoiselle Lecomte was called. Her mother, being ill, was unable to come to the Palais de Justice, and the poor girl was obliged to support alone the pain caused by an appearance which would, perhaps, have been spared her if it had not been hoped that her presence might lead the accused to change his tactics. Thérèse came forward alone, dressed in black, as though she were already in mourning for her betrothed, and hiding her face behind a veil. Her entrance caused a commotion. All eyes were turned upon her except those of Louis Lecoq, who was leaning forward to exchange a few words with his counsel. Perhaps he flattered himself that Thérèse would not see him, and that they would not inflict upon him the most atrocious suffering by obliging him to speak to the woman he adored. However, he was mistaken.

The presiding judge showed himself full of consideration for Mademoiselle Lecomte. He had a chair taken to her, and gave her time to recover herself, and it was with great gentleness that he eventually requested her to raise her veil and remove her glove before taking the oath. "Mademoiselle," he commenced, "will you please tell us at what hour M. Lecoq left your mother's house on the evening of the 13th of January?"

"At half-past nine, I believe," replied the young girl, in a scarcely audible voice.

"And the next day, the 14th of January?"

"At ten o'clock."

"You tell the truth, mademoiselle, and the court thanks you for doing so, for it realises the sad situation in which you are placed. But it expects still more from you. It hopes that you will be pleased to enlighten the jury as to M. Lecoq's sentiments."

Thérèse turned pale, and did not reply.

"I will explain myself," continued the judge. "We have before us a man whose life appears to have been irreproachable up to the day of the crime of which he stands accused. There is no one present who would not be happy to hear him exonerate himself, but he refuses to do so. He confines himself to denials, and even denies the evidence. Is it not allowable to suppose that he is restrained by an incomprehensible feeling, perhaps a fear to confess a fault, a hundred times less serious than that of the murders imputed to him, but which it costs him still more, perhaps, to confess? If he decided to tell the truth, he would no doubt appear less guilty; if he

persists in his denials, it is impossible not to believe that he has no extenuating circumstances to plead."

"I am sure that he never lied," murmured Mademoiselle Lecomte in reply.

"May the jury share your confidence, mademoiselle. And now, I beg of you to reply to another question, and not to misapprehend the object I have in view in asking it. Do you believe that Louis Lecoq has sincerely loved you?"

"I believe he has," said the young girl in a low voice.

"You have heard," said the judge, addressing the accused. "Will you still refuse to try and exonerate yourself now that the reply of your betrothed makes it easy for you to do so?"

LV.

ON hearing this Louis Lecoq started and partly rose. One would have thought for a moment that he was going to speak, but he fell back upon his bench and remained silent.

"You do not understand, then," said the judge, "that you condemn yourself by remaining silent? So you have no pity for a noble young girl who still has faith in you, and does not doubt your love? If you love her, how can you have the sad courage to persist in not confessing a fault which she will forgive you, I am sure?"

There was a deep silence. The jury and the public panted with emotion, and the old nabob actually wiped tears from his eyes.

"Make a good move, Lecoq," continued the presiding judge. "Tell us that you formerly knew Mary Fassitt; that fate led you to the cottage in the Ruc de l'Arbalète; that you gave way to a fit of anger; that you did not premeditate your crime. The jury and the court will give you credit for your candour. But do not persist in upholding a lie which will be your ruin. Speak! It is your betrothed who begs of you, through me, to do so."

This time again the accused opened his lips as though to make way for a confession, but his eyes encountered those of Thérèse in tears, and throwing himself back abruptly, he stammered: "No—no—I cannot—I cannot."

Mademoiselle Lecomte staggered. An usher caught her in his arms, and supported her on her way back to the witnesses' room through the agitated audience.

The judge waited till she had retired, and then in a severe tone, he asked: "Accused, have you anything further to add in your defence?"

"No," replied Louis Lecoq, without rising.

"The testimony is closed. The public prosecutor will now be heard."

These words resounded like a funeral knell. Every one felt that the prisoner was lost. By rejecting the means of salvation offered him by the judge, he had pronounced his own sentence.

The task of the public prosecutor was an easy one, and he accomplished it with commendable moderation. He spoke of the good antecedents of the prisoner, of doubts which might arise from certain obscure points in the case, and declared that he would have been the first to ask for a mitigation of punishment, if Lecoq had made confessions calculated to diminish his guilt. Then after this lenient exordium, he examined, one after another, the

various proofs against the prisoner, he arranged them in order, and by a series of deductions, succeeded in demonstrating that Louis Lecoq alone could have perpetrated the two murders in the Rue de l'Arbalète. "No doubt, gentlemen," he said in conclusion, "it is to be regretted that the motive which led the accused to commit the murders cannot be designated; but whatever that motive was—whether revenge, jealousy, or the fear of losing the advantages which would be assured to him by a rich marriage—whatever may have actuated the accused, it is none the less certain that the murderer of a woman and an old man is not worthy of your pity. And if the defence reminds you that certain elements are wanting in the accusation; that the identity of one of the victims has not been sufficiently established; that the deaf-mute, an innocent or voluntary accomplice, has not been confronted with the principal offender, you will not stop at these objections which do not touch the merits of the case; you will only consult your own consciences, and you will think, like myself, that society would be imperilled if the guilty could escape the law, simply because regrettable circumstances have deprived justice of a witness for the prosecution, and of certain information. You would not leave completely unpunished the greatest crimes which have horrified Paris for so many years, and you will show no 'indulgence to this man.'"

A shudder ran through the crowd. It was the prisoner's head that the public prosecutor demanded of the jury. Louis Lecoq alone remained impassive; he alone was not startled by these words. He had already realised that it was all over with him, and accepted his condemnation in advance.

The agitation had not yet subsided when the prisoner's counsel rose. He also was able and eloquent. He rendered homage to the loyalty of the public prosecutor and to the impartiality displayed by the presiding judge. Then, touching upon the facts, he called attention to the improbabilities and gaps in the accusation. He asked what interest a man in Louis Lecoq's position could have in risking his life to rid himself of a mistress and a rival. He reminded the jury that not one witness had asserted that the accused was acquainted either with M. Lheureux or with Mary Fassitt. He laid stress on certain incoherent imputations which contradicted each other, showing that it was pretended on the one hand that Lecoq had killed his two victims because he had surprised them together, and on the other that he had previously prepared the means for disposing of the bodies. Where could he have hoped to hide the remains of the unfortunate woman Mary after having them carried through the streets of a lonely neighbourhood? And the mute, where did he come from? Who had ever seen him with Lecoq? And yet he had certainly not met the assassin for the first time on the night of the crime. If he had disappeared, was it the fault of the prisoner, who since the time of his first examination had not ceased demanding a confrontation? And, admitting even that it was Lecoq who dared to go to the Rue de l'Arbalète on the night after the crime, how did it happen that he called the woman by her name of Mary? If he had killed her he ought to have known very well that she was not there to answer him. What proofs had been produced against him? asked the advocate. It had not even been established that his foot matched the prints which the murderer had left behind him. "You were told, gentlemen of the jury," exclaimed the counsel for the defence, in conclusion, "you were told that it was important for society that two execrable crimes should not remain unpunished. I tell you that it is of much greater importance that

an innocent person should not lose his head on the scaffold. You cannot condemn a man on presumptions ; and there are only presumptions against Louis Lecoq. Let the prosecution bring the undiscoverable mute before you, let him recognise the accused if he can ; and if he does so then be unmerciful ! The prosecution has asked you for the head of Louis Lecoq. I do not appeal to your pity for a mitigation of your verdict—he merits death if guilty ; but it has not yet been proved that he is guilty, and you will acquit him, I am certain."

The public were moved. Some of the jurymen wept. But a man may weep and not be convinced. The spectators said among themselves that the prisoner's counsel had not spoken either of Mademoiselle Lecomte—and in that he had really shown proper tact—or of the letter which Lecoq admitted having written. It was overwhelming for him this unfortunate letter, in which it seemed as though he wished to give notice of the crimes he was going to commit, and it would naturally weigh terribly in the decision of the jury.

The public prosecutor did not reply to the defence, and the presiding judge summoned up in moderate language, letting it be perceived, however, that he thought the prisoner guilty. Louis Lecoq was then taken away, and the jury retired to deliberate.

Their deliberations lasted for two hours, and when they returned into court the verdict could be read upon their sad faces. A few moments of painful silence followed after the foreman had replied to the usual question : "Yes, the accused is guilty." That was all. There were no extenuating circumstances, so that the verdict meant death.

The prisoner was then brought in again. He had realised everything ; and when the judge asked him if he had anything to say why sentence should not be passed upon him, he coldly replied : "Nothing, sir, whatever."

"You have three days in which to prepare your petition for the Court of Cassation, in the event of there having been any informalities in these proceedings," continued the judge, who was visibly more agitated than the condemned man.

Louis Lecoq had now only to die. He bowed to the judge and went out by the little door which opens on the road to the scaffold.

The crowd, which was deeply moved, dispersed almost in silence. No one doubted the justice of the verdict, but all thought, however, that the absolute certainty of guilt which assures the repose of conscience was lacking. The nabob had been one of the first to leave, followed by his negro, and convinced, no doubt, of the superiority of European procedure over the summary justice of his own country.

Louis Lecoq, while going through the dark passage in the rear of the court, heard one of the guards who escorted him whisper in his ear : "Your father begs you to sign your petition to the Court of Cassation this evening."

At the same moment, Thérèse Lecomte, who was leaving the witnesses' room, felt a note slipped into her hand. She approached a street lamp and hurriedly read as follows : "Don't despair. I swear to you that I will save him." And below ran the signature : "Lecoq."

PART II.

MONSIEUR LECOQ IN ACTION.

I.

PARIS is the city of contrasts. Here, people are dancing on the first floor, while on the third floor others are suffering agony; here in a garret human beings are starving, and down on the ground floor is a banking office with coffers full of gold. And like death, which goes knocking here and there—now at the portals of wealthy abodes, now at the window blinds of an attic—so misfortune falls upon a happy household at the same time as good luck enters a dwelling where it is little expected.

For three months the Quai Conti had been sad. The windows of M. Lecoq's pretty apartments had been no longer opened to the first rays of the morning sun. The dealers in old books no longer saw the alert, happy old man, who greeted them with a smile, loitering before their boxes covering the parapets of the quay. And they were not the only ones who noticed his absence. The poor of the neighbourhood regretted him, and the birds of the Tuileries garden as well. At Boulogne, in that charming villa which should have been the abode of joy, the inmates wept night and day. After the sentence pronounced upon Louis Lecoq, Madame Lecomte had wished to leave France—to fly from the accursed city where her darling daughter's betrothed was spending his last hours upon earth in a cell at La Roquette.

But Thérèse had begged her to remain. She still believed in Louis' innocence and still hoped in the future, for she knew that Father Lecoq had not despaired of saving the unfortunate fellow whom all the world had abandoned. How many times had she read that note which she preserved so precious, and which she had not even shown to her mother—that note in which the old detective swore to her that he would restore her sweet-heart to her. She had faith in the father whom she had seen so tender in the happy days now gone, and so firm in presence of the catastrophe. She would gladly have helped him, have encouraged him at least, have told him that her heart had not changed, that her love had but increased, and that if her lover must die, she would never be another's wife.

But M. Lecoq had disappeared, and since the fatal day when the sentence of the Assize Court fell upon his son, he had given no sign of life. She suspected that he was working in the shade, but she did not even know if he were in Paris. She had learned through the newspapers that the condemned man, after at first refusing to appeal to the Cour de Cassation, had finally decided to sign the petition which assured him a short prolongation of existence. And the poor child counted the days, reflecting that each passing hour brought him nearer to the horrible morning when the executioner would come to take him to the scaffold. Would the saviour arrive in time? Thérèse asked herself in anguish. Would God have pity on her, or would He allow an innocent man to be led to the guillotine? She herself was powerless; she could only pray and lament. She strolled alone under the unbragous trees of the park where they had exchanged vows of eternal

love, and those who saw her pass, pale, and dressed in black, realized that the rich have their sorrows like the poor, and pitied the inmates of this elegant villa, which had formerly excited their envy.

Folks were less disconsolate at the residence of M. Tolbiac de Tinchebray. He himself had a great many reasons for rejoicing, and his surroundings gave evidence of his good-humour. His housekeeper adorned herself in elegant toilets, his groom appeared in a new livery, and his whole establishment had a festive air. Father Lecoq's disaster had proved profitable to M. Tolbiac, who, in fact, secretly aspired to succeed the old track-hunter. The latter, although retired from business, had somewhat barred the way of the young detective lately arrived from across the Channel. Until quite recently, indeed, M. Lecoq had been an authority at the Prefecture of police and elsewhere. Each time that a difficult case presented itself it was submitted to M. Lecoq; he was besieged with applications, and it only rested with him to take charge of most remunerative investigations. The good man having disappeared, on finding himself so deeply compromised, his former clients were obliged to apply to his fortunate competitor. So M. Tolbiac was almost assured of making a speedy fortune in the same lucrative business which had already enriched Father Lecoq. Besides, the affair of the Rue de l'Arbalète had served him well. Not that M. Tolbiac had discovered the assassin, whom he had engaged to bring to justice within a month, for the honour of that capture belonged to Piedouche, but the latter had since so fallen from grace that he was no longer taken into account. Like Lecoq himself, he too had gone into hiding. He was more than ever suspected of having favoured the mute's escape, and if he were sought for it was only in view of again clapping him into prison.

Thus the chief of the criminal investigation department, who perhaps had a weak memory, attributed all the success of the operations to Tolbiac. The latter had certainly superintended the subsequent phases of the investigation, and had assisted the examining magistrate with considerable zeal and sagacity. And the chief felt kindly disposed towards him for the moderation which he had shown in reference to the Lecoqs, both father and son. Tolbiac had, indeed, always expressed great respect for the father, and had always carefully abstained from accusing the son.

The prosecution was also indebted to him for an important discovery. It was he who recommended advertising to the effect that any one possessing information or documents, of a nature to throw light on the mystery of the Rue de l'Arbalète should forward particulars to the public prosecution office. These advertisements—often resorted to in England, but seldom in France—had an excellent result; for on the very next day, the authorities at the Palais de Justice received the letter said to have been written by Louis Lecoq to Mary Fassitt; the same letter which, when read at the trial had, no doubt, determined the jury to condemn the prisoner. In short, the brilliant detective was looked upon with favour in high places, and was gliding under full sail towards fortune.

Besides, his name had not figured in the newspapers in connection with the trial, and not having been summoned as a witness, he had not had to appear. So his friends of both sexes had not ceased to look upon him as a perfect gentleman, with no other occupation than to lead a happy life. And thus, Louis Lecoq's condemnation having brought leisure to M. Tolbiac, he willingly amused himself. He was able to engage in the pursuit of pleasure, for he had made large sums of money in London by the exercise of his profession, and he was in the way to gain even more in Paris.

The O'Sullivan inheritance would have sufficed to enrich him, since he was engaged to find the heir of a man who had been ten times a millionaire, and if he were successful he would receive an enormous commission. Such, at least, was the declaration he had made at the Prefecture of police, where he had gone in search of certain information which they were unable to furnish him, but which they had authorised him to procure in person. Profiting by this permission, he spent his mornings in his study, examining letters and documents which must have had some bearing on this famous inheritance. He was occasionally absent for twenty-four hours at a time without his servants knowing where he had gone; in this case, instead of using his own carriage, he would go out on foot and return in a cab. No doubt the object of these mysterious journeys was to make certain investigations necessary to be conducted with the greatest secrecy.

Nevertheless, he neither went to Boulogne, to Madame Lecomte's, nor to the Orleans railway terminus, where Pierre Cambremer was employed. Perhaps he thought this was hardly the time to talk on business with the mother of Louis Lecoq's betrothed, and perhaps he remembered that the switchman had received him badly. Probably, also, Thérèse and little Marthe, Cambremer's daughter, had no right to the inheritance, save in case of the death of a nearer heir, and no doubt it was this heir he sought for.

At all events one thing is certain, Cambremer had been several times to the Rue Godot de Mauroy, in view of returning the louis which had fallen on the track, but he had never succeeded in reaching M. Tolbiac.

He had even finished by entrusting the concierge with the gold which his daughter had found, which had almost led to her being crushed while picking it up. Judging from appearances, the elegant occupant of the first floor did not care to admit a mere working-man into his rooms. The people whom he received belonged, indeed, to another class of society. He sought out the fast livers and rich foreigners, friends of pleasure; the fashionable young women who drive in the Bois every day; and he seemed particularly intimate with one of these latter, an "irregular," who had just arrived in Paris, and whose luxury already caused considerable talk. She was noted for her thoroughbred horses, her well-trained servants, and her *salon* where she received men of all the different social circles. M. Tolbiac visited her residence constantly, and one evening, soon after the condemnation of Louis Lecoq, he found himself there in company with many others who had assembled for a card party, when suddenly the gorgeously liveried lackey who guarded the entry to the drawing-room, advanced a step and announced, "His Excellency Djafer, Nabob of Bahour."

II.

THIS strange foreign name caused quite a sensation among the guests of Madame Arabella Disney—as the foreign "irregular" was called. All eyes were turned towards the grand personage whose name had been so pompously announced. The women ceased for an instant to chatter, and the game of baccarat was interrupted, but not for long. However, this nabob was really worth looking at. He was a majestic old man, dressed in Oriental style; covered with silk, gold, and precious stones. The dazzling splendour of his costume, his snowy beard, swarthy complexion, glittering eyes and white teeth, at once won him the sympathy of the Parisian butler-ticks. The men remarked that he had an appearance of grandeur, and

treated him with deference. As for the lady of the house, she came forward to meet him with marked eagerness, and thanked him in fitting terms for having graciously accepted the invitation she had sent to him, although a stranger. Arabella Disney made a specialty of welcoming to her abode all the persons of distinction who came from distant countries to initiate themselves into the gay mysteries of Parisian life. She had acquaintances in the chief hotels, and no Asiatic prince or millionaire from across the sea landed without her writing to him, begging of him to honour her Thursday reunions with his presence.

Thus it happened that, having learned that the opulent Nabob of Bahour had been in Paris for a week, she hastened to invite him to the luxurious apartments she occupied on the first floor of a splendid house in the Boulevard Haussmann. And the nabob having replied that he accepted her invitation with great pleasure, Arabella had informed her numerous friends that at her next *fête* she should offer them the noble company of an Indian Excellency. The nabob had attracted considerable attention at the Assize Court, and his presence necessarily drew a crowd to Arabella's drawing-rooms—a select crowd, be it understood, for she only received men of position. Hardly four months had elapsed since she had first shown herself in the Champs-Élysées, the Bois, or the fashionable theatres. She had arrived straight from London, and as she displayed superb equipages and magnificent toilets no one took the trouble to inquire into her past.

M. Tolbiac, who had known her on the other side of the channel, had greatly contributed to opening the doors to the society he so much frequented. He was not the last to approach the noble guest who had just entered, and who was now saluting the queen of this lovely *salon*. He even spoke to him in English, thinking that this language would be more familiar to him than French. But, with a strong accent, which had nothing Britannic about it, the nabob replied in French :

“Excuse me, sir, for replying to you in the only European language I speak. I was not born in the provinces governed by England in the East Indies. My family and myself have always served France. I am from the vicinity of Pondicherry, and my feelings are so strongly French that I have never been willing to learn English.”

“That sentiment is an honour to your excellency,” replied M. Tolbiac, who was somewhat surprised.

“And I ought to consider myself fortunate,” said Miss Arabella, affectedly, “that your excellency does not look upon me with disfavour, for I am English by birth and in heart.”

“Oh,” replied the nabob, gaily, “I don’t carry my patriotism so far as to fly from the women of your country, when they are as charming as yourself, madame.”

This compliment, at short range, was extremely well received, and maybe it was sincere, for Madame Disney was still very good-looking, although she had passed the limit of early youth. Her fair hair was of an adorable shade, her skin of dazzling whiteness, her lips fresh and ruddy, and her blue eyes of extraordinary brilliance. This marvellous *ensemble* was somewhat spoiled by a want of frankness in her expression. Arabella smiled a great deal upon those with whom she conversed, but she never looked them in the face. She smiled, therefore, at the nabob and prepared a gracious reply, but just then two *attachés* of the Brazilian legation were announced. These transatlantic diplomats were her particular friends, and to receive them she was obliged to leave the Indian noble sooner than she wished.

"M. Tolbiac de Tinchebray, whom I have the honour to introduce to you, will be delighted to place himself at your excellency's service," she said, graciously, and then turned toward the Brazilians.

"What a charming person!" exclaimed the nabob to M. Tolbiac, "and how much I am indebted to her for inviting me, I such an utter stranger in Paris. You know her well, sir?"

"Well is not the word," replied Tolbiac. "Madame Disney is very hospitable, and her house is one of the most agreeable in Paris. I often come here, because there is always something amusing on foot; and I hope, excellency, that we shall sometimes meet here, for I suppose you travel for pleasure?"

"For pleasure, in the first place, and also on account of a little matter of business. And then I like to study the habits of the countries I visit. I belong to a French colony, and never before visited France. Since I have been in Paris, everything has interested me, from the customs of the gracious society in which I find myself this evening, to the manner in which justice is dispensed. For instance, I became passionately interested in the trial of that young man who was condemned to death."

"In fact, the newspapers have stated that you did not miss a sitting."

"So the papers occupy themselves respecting me?"

"It's only quite natural. Your presence was remarked by all who attended the trial."

"Then, I congratulate myself on having gone. It is one of the good fortunes one only meets with in Paris. I was anxious to witness the trial of an assassin; I have seen one, and have been invited to pass the evening at the residence of a charming woman. In truth, it is more than I could have hoped for. But tell me, sir, do you think that the lad was really guilty?"

"I think so."

"It seemed to me that there was room for doubt."

"I will admit to you, excellency, that I gave the affair but little attention. I seldom read the *Gazette des Tribunaux*, but still, I heard a letter spoken of which this Lecoq had written to the murdered woman."

"And which seriously compromised him, it is true."

"Besides, when a jury condemns, they must be very sure that they are right."

"Quite correct, sir, and it would be bad taste on the part of one who so much admires French justice as I do to find fault with a verdict rendered by enlightened and independent men. But, I ask your pardon, sir, for having alluded to so gloomy a subject; and, since you are willing to take the place of Madame Disney while she does the honours of her residence, I will venture to ask you to be my introducer into a world which is quite new to me. I am, perhaps, somewhat out of place on account of my age, but I declare that it gives me infinite pleasure."

"When a man is noble and rich like you, excellency," said M. Tolbiac, laughing; "he is always young in Paris. That is the opinion of all the beautiful women who meet on Thursdays at Arabella's; and since you permit me to introduce you—"

"Oh, with pleasure, and if you have any friends here, I shall be delighted to make their acquaintance also. But before I avail myself of your kindness, I must tell you a little about myself, for you might misconstrue the motive which leads me to frequent Parisian society somewhat more than is becoming in an old man, say what you will. I am the last of my race, having had the misfortune to lose a son whom I adored."

M. Tolbiac made a gesture of sympathy.

"I possess a large fortune in India," said the nabob, "and it will revert to the state if I do not dispose of it; but I should like to leave it to the descendants of a man who, in days gone by, saved my father's life. Unfortunately, his descendants are unknown to me, and if I have come to Europe, it is in hopes of discovering them."

"I shall be delighted, excellency, to help you to accomplish this noble task," said Tolbiac, earnestly, for he already foresaw an opportunity for making a large amount of money by the exercise of his talents.

"I thank you, sir," said the Indian grandee, "and I am convinced that through your numerous connections you are well situated to procure me much valuable information. Strange as it may seem to you after what I have told you concerning my prejudices against the English race, my father's friend was, in point of fact, an officer in the English army. His name was O'Sullivan."

III.

"O'SULLIVAN!" repeated M. Tolbiac. "Do you speak of Major James O'Sullivan?"

"Who served with the thirty-third regiment of infantry," continued the nabob.

"In the Presidency of Bombay?" added the detective.

"Precisely."

"And who died at Poonah, in 1811?"

"You know that!" exclaimed the Indian; "but perhaps you know his heirs then. Ah, sir, if you can give me any information in regard to them, you will render me an immense service, and my gratitude will be unbounded."

M. Tolbiac's face was curious to behold. It expressed at the same time astonishment, cupidity, and disquietude. Astonishment above all, and there was good reason for being astounded. The O'Sullivan succession was his great affair. He had left London expressly to attend to it, and he had spoken of it to no one except to his superiors at the Prefecture of police. And behold, he suddenly finds himself in presence of a man who has come from Pondicherry expressly to find traces of the major's descendants. Now Tolbiac looked upon this inheritance almost as though he was its owner. At least he looked upon it in the light of a mine to be worked, a mine of gold richer than many of the mines of California. So he was inclined to mistrust a stranger who appeared so unexpectedly in the midst of his combinations. And yet the stranger did not seem anxious to compete with him; indeed, on the contrary, he talked of leaving his own wealth to the very descendants of the late O'Sullivan. This praiseworthy intention was worthy of remark, and Tolbiac, having recovered from his trouble, resolved to manœuvre with prudence, and in the first place assure himself that the nabob did not disguise his real intentions.

"Excellency," he said, after a short pause, "you are surprised that I am so well informed, and, indeed, you had no reason to expect that in a gay drawing-room in Paris you would meet a Frenchman knowing the name of an officer who died thousands of miles from France, more than sixty years ago. I must tell you, however, that I have lived a long time in England, and that I associated there with a director of the East India Company, who often talked of Major O'Sullivan, and especially of his estate."

"He left a fortune, then?" asked the nabob, in a most natural manner.

"A somewhat large fortune," replied Tolbiac, who did not wish to say too much; "and the fortune has not passed to the heirs, for the simple reason that it is not known what has become of them."

"Then they are already rich?"

"They would be if they made themselves known and could establish their rights, but, so far, no one has claimed the inheritance. Nevertheless, it is almost certain that the O'Sullivan family is not extinct. The major had four sisters, all of whom had children; but they died in poverty, and the children became dispersed."

"Why did I not learn this sad story before?" sighed the noble Djafer.

"At different periods searches have been made, but it was already too late. The major's fortune was derived from the sale of land he owned in Canada, where he had formerly served, and which was of no value during his life-time. But a city was afterwards built upon the property, which fetched a high price long after his death. This explains why the trustees found it impossible to find the heirs. I ought to say the heir, for there can be but one. According to the English law, in collateral branches, the nearest of kin excludes all others. So, if a nephew of Major O'Sullivan were still living, he would inherit everything to the detriment of a grand-nephew, the grandson of another sister; still this grand-nephew would inherit before a great grand-nephew, and so on."

"I thank you, sir; it is impossible to define more clearly the situation of the family which I am interested in, and should an opportunity arise, I will profit by the information you have so kindly given."

"Dare I ask what use you will make of this information?" asked Tolbiac, with some hesitation.

"It is very simple. If the nephews of my father's friend should fortunately be discovered, I should divide my fortune among those who found themselves excluded from a share in the inheritance."

"Nothing could be more philanthropical. These poor people—they must be poor, for if they were rich their existence would not be unknown—these poor people would be indebted to you for the portion the law refuses them. They would bless you, and you would enjoy the spectacle of their happiness; for, if I have rightly understood your intentions, you would not require them to wait for your death."

"Oh, no!" exclaimed the nabob, "I should say to them: 'Come to me; you are my children. All that I possess belongs to you.' And how happy I should be to have a family, I who am alone in the world. Unfortunately, it is only a dream."

"Perhaps not," said M. Tolbiac, impressively.

"Alas! I wish I could only hope that this dream might be realised. But haven't you just told me that all searches for the heirs had been fruitless? So how could I—I who arrive from distant India, discover what the English authorities have unsuccessfully sought after?"

"Of course, if you made the search yourself, it is probable you would fail, excellency. But others could search for you."

"Others! And who, then? Do you know anyone whom I could engage for this mission?"

"No; but some one might be found. You are unaware, perhaps, that in France and in England there are people who make a business of undertaking such missions. I have many connections in Paris, and will do my best to put you in communication with one of these searchers."

"Oh ! sir, how grateful I shall be to you."

"But I shall be too happy to be of service to you. Still I ought to inform you that the parties I speak of do not work for nothing. They even put a pretty high price on their services."

"That matters little. I am rich and will pay whatever they ask. If it is necessary to advance a sum in order to have the search commenced, I am ready to advance it."

"In that case," said M. Tolbiac, whose eyes were glistening, "I can assure you that within three days from now I will send you a man who is both active and intelligent. Moreover, as early as to-morrow, I will write to London and ask for all the information which has been gathered up to the present ; I will acquaint the man you employ with all that has been done, and I am convinced that he will succeed. If the investigations have been without result so far, it is no doubt because they have been managed by persons who were not interested in the affair. But an agent to whom you promised a handsome recompense would do it quicker and better than all the solicitors in England."

"May God hear you, sir ! and since you consent to render me so great a service, I hope that I shall have the honour of soon seeing you again."

"The honour will be mine, and if your excellency would be pleased to tell me where I could meet him—"

"I am stopping temporarily at the Grand Hotel, but as I shall pass at least a year in France, I intend to purchase a house where I can install myself at my ease. We Orientals are accustomed to a somewhat free existence, and if I could find some villa with a park—"

"I know of one which would suit you exactly, and, if agreeable to you, I will find out if it is to be sold."

"Really, sir, you overwhelm me, and I do not know how to express to you my—"

At this moment the nabob's compliments were interrupted by Madame Disney, who, having installed her Brazilians at a card-table, had returned to lavish her attentions and smiles upon the lion of the *soirée*.

"Excellency," she said, displaying all her charms, "my friends are very angry with M. Tolbiac for having thus monopolised your society. Allow me to introduce you to them."

The nabob complied with the manner of a man accustomed to receive the homage of the most beautiful half of humanity. In India women strive to please their masters, and Djafer might have thought that he was still enthroned in his palace at Bahour, for Arabella's lively guests were not sparing in their attentions. They were persuaded that he possessed millions, and that he had come to France to spend them.

"Do you play baccarat, excellency?" asked the Englishwoman, when the ceremony of introduction had been completed.

"I know the game," replied the noble foreigner ; "it is played very much at Pondicherry, but it is not the one I prefer."

"Do you like lansquenet better?" asked the lady quickly.

"No. The game which pleases me the best of all—you will laugh at me perhaps—is the game at which that poor woman who was assassinated amused herself—it is the game of patience. Isn't it that you call it?"

IV.

No one was expecting this allusion to the trial which all Paris was still talking of, and it somewhat disconcerted Madame Disney's pretty guests. They had expected that the nabob would hold the bank at baccarat, and would not be too severe with the little tricks practised by their pretty hands. And so they began to pout when they heard this opulent noble declare his preference for a game which, being played by one person alone, it is impossible to lose money at. Arabella appeared even more impressed than her young friends. As an Englishwoman, she was very sensitive, and she was affected by these words, which reminded her of the sentence she had heard pronounced a few days before upon a handsome young man.

Djafer, Nabob of Bahour, noticed the worry he had caused the beautiful mistress of the house, and as he did not wish to afflict her he hastened to modify his previous words. "I play at patience when I am alone in my palace at Bahour," he continued, "but I have no inclination to do so when I have the good fortune to find myself, as I do this evening, in such charming company. If these ladies wish to play at baccarat, I am quite at their orders."

"We have just been playing, and the poor Gustave who held the bank is 'stumped,'" said a pretty blonde, answering to the sweet name of Herminie, and who looked at the nabob with eyes still more wicked than her name was sweet.

"His excellency will replace him with advantage," exclaimed Tolbiac. And approaching Arabella, he uttered in a low tone, and in English, a few words which the Indian could not understand, if, as he affirmed, he only knew French and his native language.

He was decidedly very much civilised, this Indian, and did not fly from the Parisian ladies, for he addressed some exceedingly well turned compliments to Mademoiselle Herminie, and even showed his gallantry to the extent of offering her his arm, despite the usages of his country.

While this rather strangely-assorted couple crossed the drawing-room, M. Tolbiac held an earnest and animated conversation with Madame Disney. They were evidently talking about the Nabob of Bahour, and were much interested in the personage who had come to France expressly to bring several millions to the heirs of Major O'Sullivan. Their talk was after all but natural, for Tolbiac was a serious man, who, even in the midst of pleasure, never lost sight of business, and Madame Disney was his intimate friend. The last charming phrase spoken by the daughter of Albion was this, "From the way in which he loses his money, you will soon know whether he is rich or not."

Tolbiac replied with a gesture, which signified, "Be easy, I'll watch him." And he then went and took a place at the table at which the Indian had just seated himself.

Djafer had Herminie for a neighbour, and he had kept up with her a constant chattering, in which Arabella had been gently spoken of. "I am her most intimate friend," said the fair girl, "she has no secrets from me."

"I should like very well to know yours," replied the gallant foreigner; then perceiving that those around him were waiting he turned his attention to the cards. It was with marked satisfaction that the players had re-

ceived this banker who had fallen among them from distant India. They had just divided a somewhat small sum, lost by a young swell whom the women familiarly called Gustave, and they hoped that the nabob would offer them a larger treat. A man who had arrived from the vicinity of Golconda ought to have treasures in his pocket.

Djafer produced a pocket-book, from which he took a package of one thousand franc-notes and a small oblong book. "I did not expect to play this evening," he said quietly. "So I have only twenty thousand francs about me, but here is my cheque-book on Rothschild, and I beg these gentlemen, and especially these ladies, not to limit their play to the modest sum I have in bank notes."

A flattering murmur was produced by this little speech. The men prepared themselves for an earnest battle, while the women resolved to profit by the occasion to gain a few louis. Herminie received more than one malevolent look from her good friends, but she did not notice them. She was carried away with the pleasure of being seated so near to a handsome old man who had only to sign a cheque to make Rothschild's vaults fly open.

"Decidedly, he is a real nabob," said Tolbiac to himself. And while awaiting the moment to make what he could out of this nabob in another way, Arabella's intelligent friend gave himself up to the enterprise at hand.

The habitués of the beautiful Englishwoman's reception rooms were all "old stagers" at play, assiduous frequenters of the clubs where high play is indulged in, and they were also great experts in judging, at the first glance, of the financial condition of a baccarat banker. There were some young men among them, but experience comes quickly when you lead a fast life in Paris, and these knew quite as much as the veterans about the game. They were, besides, honest, at least as much as the man can be who risks money which he does not possess. Arabella had too much *finesse*, and Tolbiac, who advised her, too much good sense, to admit blacklegs.

An artless stranger might easily have thought that he was in good company, for the men were well dressed, and the women in brave apparel. Djafer, Nabob of Bahour, did not, perhaps, carry the illusion so far, but he seemed to enjoy himself infinitely in this gay society, and he was no doubt anxious to please the company, for he announced that he would hold unlimited stakes, and authorised the ladies to play on parole. They did not neglect this good opportunity, only the permission did them no good, for, from the very first, fortune favoured the nabob.

He won and still won. His adversaries doubled and then trebled their stakes in hopes of recouping their losses, but he still won. This was not a combat for the guests; it was a rout, and the Indian's formidable run of luck continued till he had completely exhausted the resources of the imprudent gamblers who dared to try their strength against him. At the end of a couple of hours Djafer had indeed won almost two thousand louis, and found himself the creditor of five or six charming persons, who hoped they would never have to open their purses to pay their debts.

Herminie owed at least twelve hundred francs. Tolbiac lost three thousand. Arabella did not play. She had contented herself with remaining a mere spectator of the game, and when the party rose she managed to have another private talk with Tolbiac. What she asked of him in English must have concerned the nabob and the game, for her friend, on leaving her, said, in pure Parisian: "He didn't cheat, or I should have known it, for I watched him all the time."

The noble Djafer, who bore his laurels modestly, accepted a cup of tea from Madame Disney's white hands, but excused himself for not partaking of supper, and despite all insistence, then took his leave, promising to attend the next reunion, and give the vanquished their revenge. Tolbiac, on conducting him to the door of the apartment, again promised that within a few days he would find him a suitable business agent, who would undertake to conduct the search for the major's heirs. The nabob thanked him profusely, pressed both his hands affectionately, and went out, followed by his black servant, who was waiting for him in the anteroom.

This faithful servant, who followed his master everywhere, even to the Assize Court, this *valet* in turban and caftan, was not a negro, although the colour of his skin approached closely to that of ebony. He had neither the thick lips nor the close curling hair of the African, nor his unreserved, petulant nature. During his long stay, in the midst of grooms and maids, he had stood motionless like a statue, without once opening his lips.

Djafer's equipage was at the door—a handsome hired landau with a coachman in livery. The Nabob of Bahour entered it with his confidential servant, and the horses trotted off in the direction of the Grand Hotel.

"Well, patron?" asked the slave of his master.

"Well, my boy, I don't regret that I came to this woman's place," replied the noble, who certainly was not born in the neighbourhood of Pondicherry. "I made Tolbiac talk, and have learned a good deal from him."

V.

IN Madame Disney's drawing-room the handsome old man might well be taken for a nabob, and his servant for a native of the coast of Coromandel. But if one of Arabella's guests, or one of her friends, had heard them chatting while seated in the landau, they would have at once entertained serious doubts as to the authenticity of the nationality they claimed. The foreign accent which the Nabob of Bahour affected while talking with the ladies had entirely disappeared, and the slave's silent tongue had been suddenly loosened.

This Asiatic noble now expressed himself with great ease and in excellent French. His tone of voice and his language were indeed even essentially Parisian. The servant's manners had also changed, and he seemed to be on a footing of respectable familiarity with the prince whom, in the presence of others, he so humbly served.

The solution of this enigma was a far less difficult matter than the explanation of the mystery of the Rue de l'Arbalète. Paternal love can beget prodigies. Djafer, Nabob of Bahour, had been created complete by M. Lecoq the renounced detective, after his son's condemnation. Having decided to work till the last moment in striving to prove Louis' innocence, the old man-hunter had realised that it was of the greatest importance that he should assume a borrowed character. And he had chosen one which he was well aware would not be too closely looked into. Paris is visited every year by dozens of foreign princes, more or less millionaires, and many of whom are not all what they appear—far from it. To play the *rôle*, it sufficed for him to have some money in his pocket and credentials in fair condition. Foreign nobles have even been seen without either credentials or money, but who have still made a good appearance in society, and obtained extensive credit with tradesmen.

Father Lecoq having converted all his fortune into ready money, possessed the sinews of war, and having secretly gone to London shortly after the mute's disappearance, he had bought there, at a long price, the papers of a ruined and dispossessed nabob who had come to Europe in search of fortune. Piédouche had accompanied his former patron on this excursion across the channel, and had seen himself transformed at one stroke into the attendant of the Nabob of Bahour.

The question of disguising themselves troubled neither of them. On this point the veteran detective and ex-number 29 were experts, and could have instructed the most accomplished actors in the art of disguise. Lecoq and his servant knew how to change their appearance at pleasure, not alone their costume, but also their manners, gait and faccs. Lecoq even possessed the rare gift of changing his voice to such a degree as to render it unrecognisable. Piédouche, less favoured in this respect by nature, was condemned to perpetual silence, and as he was not supposed to speak anything but Hindustani, his dumbness could astonish no one. During an absence of three months, Lecoq had had time to let his beard grow, and it had attained a truly Oriental length; and as for forty years he had only been seen with his face cleanly shaved, this beard almost sufficed to make another man of him. Piédouche, from time immemorial, had worn a short brush-like moustache. He had cut this off, had painted his face, neck, and hands with a composition which he made himself. And, to complete the transformation, had succeeded, after patient study, in imparting the expression of an Asiatic to his features. Thus transfigured, the two only remaining friends of Thérèse's unfortunate lover, had made a most successful entry into the Grand Hotel.

The newspapers had announced that the Nabob of Bahour was within the walls of Paris, and neither the Prefecture of police nor the ministry of foreign affairs suspected this personage of possessing only a borrowed title. The gold he spent had its weight, and the life he lead was not of a nature to awaken the suspicions of the French government. There were, perhaps, in Paris two or three ex-colonial functionaries who could have stated that the Nabob of Bahour no longer existed—Bahour, be it understood, is one of the two provinces which constitute Pondicherry. But that was a small risk to run, and Father Lecoq had motives for running it. For certain reasons known to himself, he was anxious that it should be thought he did not understand English. He could not then claim to have come from British possessions.

Neither was it by chance that he had installed himself at the Grand Hotel, where he occupied a splendid, vast apartment on the first floor. In this immense caravansary travellers of all nations meet and mingle. In the passages and on the stairs there is such a constant passing to and fro, that no particular person's movements are noticed. On his arrival the nabob had informed the manager that the servants of the hotel were not to enter his rooms, as he wished to be served exclusively by his black attendant, whom he had decorated with the name of Ali. Everybody knows that Asiatic princes do not willingly allow infidels to approach their illustrious persons, and so no one was astonished by this order.

On his side Piédouche had, by piercing gimlet-holes in the doors and partitions, at once established a system of observation which allowed him at any moment to assure himself if the road were clear, that is to say, if he were liable to meet any one in the passages. Thanks to these precautions, whenever he chose to reappear in the guise of a Frenchman, he could with-

out danger of being recognised, leave the apartment and gain the street. To return to his master's abode the manoeuvre was not much less complicated. He entered the hotel unconcernedly and went up to the first floor. Then, if he saw any one in the passage, he had only to pretend to be going still higher. If on the contrary, the passage was deserted, he quickly gained the nabob's door, opened it with a key he always carried in his pocket, and disappeared to show himself again in his assumed character as a black man. Naturally enough he could not disguise himself as a vagrant or a workman, as he had formerly done in following the mute. People who are poorly dressed are not received at the swell hotel where the millionaires of both hemispheres resort. So Piédouche was forced to choose respectable costumes; but he had made arrangements for a place in town where, if absolutely necessary, he could exchange his good clothes for a blouse, blue linen trousers, and a cap.

Father Lecoq could, in an extremity, avail himself of the same means, but from prudence he preferred to remain the nabob, and he had not yet needed to drop the *rôle* which he played so well. Besides, everything had so far gone as he desired, and he was especially satisfied with the evening he had just spent.

"And so, patron," said Piédouche, "you think it is in Tolbiac's direction we must hunt?"

"I think so, but I am not sure of it. I am only sure of one thing, that he is hand-in-hand with Arabella Disney. I heard him say to her in English, 'There is some news.' And I congratulate myself more and more on having passed for a nabob of the French possessions. If Tolbiac suspected that I understand the language he talks to his associate, he would be on his guard, whereas, some day or other, he will betray himself."

"Then you expect to see him again soon?"

"As soon as possible. He bit at the bait I held out to him. He is now convinced that I have come to France in search of the heirs of Major O'Sullivan in order to make my fortune over to them. He has promised to procure me a man who will find them for me. The man will no doubt be himself, and I shall get him in close quarters. Something tells me that the secret of Tolbiac's life lies in the pursuit of this inheritance."

"Well, if that is the case, the London detectives are certainly not shrewd. If you were in his place you would never have related your affairs to the chief of the criminal investigation service."

"Tolbiac was afraid that they might notice at the Prefecture that he was working on his own account, and that they might try to trip him up. Besides, he has been prudent, and only told what he chose to tell. And so, at the present time, I don't know very much. But I was struck by a coincidence: O'Sullivan, his heirs, Tolbiac's mistress, and the murdered woman are all English. Tolbiac is half English himself. I want, in the first place, to find out the major's filiation. If I discover, for instance, that Mary Fassitt descended from him, the rest will go by itself."

"Unfortunately," sighed Piédouche, "they could tell you nothing about that in London."

"It is in Paris we must search," said the false nabob bluntly. "Tell me about Louis. Has Pigache seen him?"

VI.

"You know very well, patron," replied Piédouche, "that the prisoners at La Roquette cannot be seen without special permission. Pigache may belong to the 'establishment' no doubt, but he doesn't enter M. Louis' cell. He has news, though, every day. He's cunning, my old Pigache, although he doesn't appear so. He found a way of becoming intimate with one of the warders of the prison. It costs him a drink every day, and it is well worth four, for he knows everything, he does, about your boy. Not later than six o'clock this evening, at the wine-shop at the corner of the Boulevard de Ménilmontant, right opposite the Père-Lachaise cemetery, the warder told him that M. Louis spent all his time in writing."

"In writing!" repeated Father Lecoq, with a troubled air. He asked himself if his unfortunate son was not committing his impressions as a convict to paper, and he trembled for fear the officials might use against him some imprudent sentences inspired by despair; for he knew that nothing is lost in prisons; that there are eyes to read written confessions, like there are ears to listen to spoken ones.

"Yes," said Piédouche, "it seems that he writes letters to his sweetheart, the one at Boulogne, poor young lady! When I think that I'm the cause of her sorrow, and of M. Louis' also, I feel like throwing myself into the water with a stone tied to my neck. She looks so good. If you only knew how she received me—I who had just arrested her lover."

"Be quiet!" cried the old man. "You can see very well that you rend my heart."

"Excuse me, patron, it's stronger than I am. I've always that scene in my head, and I forget that it causes you sorrow when I recall it to you."

There was a pause. M. Lecoq was so much affected that he would have been sorely troubled to have properly played his rôle of nabob. Fortunately, M. Tolbiac could not see him weep.

"Did Pigache say what they thought at the Prefecture about Louis' affair?" he asked forcing back his emotion.

"Yes, he told me of rumours which were going about," replied Piédouche with an effort. "At the 'establishment' and at La Roquette they pretend that if the appeal is rejected, that will settle it—as the affair of the Rue de l'Arbalète has made such a fuss in the newspapers—and, also, because your son is a gentleman. They talk this way: that if they reprieved him it would create an uproar—for folks would bawl out that the law was not the same for all. However, that's clap-trap. If they want it to be the same for all, they ought not to execute a man because he happens to have means. And, then, another thing is that the last two were reprieved and that would make three, one after the other. It seems that this is not often seen."

"Fine justice which makes the life of one man depend on the fate that has befallen the unfortunate fellows who were condemned before him," said M. Lecoq, bitterly. And he continued in a voice which was shaking with emotion: "How much time do they think still remains to us?"

"A month, patron," murmured Piédouche. "It is now the 5th of May; the appeal won't be reached till the beginning of June. Unless—"

"Go on."

"Unless special orders are given for the judges of the Court of Cassation

to take it up sooner. You remember the affair of the doctor, who poisoned a woman about a dozen years ago—well, that was settled in a week.”

“A week!” repeated the old man, shuddering. “No—no—God will not allow them to kill my son before I have done all to save him. Through Pigache, you will know all that takes place—if they hasten the time you must let me know—I will write to the public prosecutor. I will sign some other name than my own and promise him some revelations—the letter shall be posted in England—the authorities would then have to wait for the arrival of a witness whose evidence might change everything—we might gain some more time—and time is Louis’ salvation. And then, they dare not do things too quickly. They feel that doubts still remain. The Court of Cassation only adjudicates on points of law, but the judges who sit there are men, and if some new evidence were to reveal Louis’ innocence, they would know very well how to find formal defects in the procedure.”

Piédouche said not a word. He thought the same as Father Lecoq, only he did not deceive himself, and he considered it impossible to prove that the condemned man was not guilty. “Yes,” he said, more from compliance than from conviction, “a telling blow must be struck. For instance, if we could ferret out a witness to swear that the Englishwoman at the cottage was in the habit of receiving a man who was neither M. Louis nor the merchant who was killed—”

“That would not be sufficient. No one has a right to hear such a witness, since the verdict has been given.”

“All the same if he were found. Look here, the coal-dealer didn’t recognise M. Louis, nor his wife either. They nevertheless swore they had often seen a well-dressed gentleman at Mary Fassitt’s. They must be brought face to face with this gentleman.”

“And how? If this man is the assassin, he will take good care not to show himself in the Rue de l’Arbalète.”

“That’s certain; but the coal-dealer might be taken to places where he would, perhaps, meet him. It’s an idea I’ve had for a week, and the day before yesterday, when I went out in my sealskin, I went and chatted with the fellow on his door-step. I even paid for drinks, and we are already a pair of friends. One of these mornings I shall propose to him a walk in the swell neighbourhoods, and then we shall see.”

“I count but little on such a chance,” replied M. Lecoq. “Chance has always been against us. Not that I would deter you from following up your plan, but I expect more from the campaign I opened this morning on gaining a foothold at Madame Disney’s.”

“Tolbiac’s mistress. Yes, she must know a great deal about the ‘police-man.’ And I’d put my hand in the fire if he’s true blue. In the first place, he spends money like water, and no one knows where he gets this money from. The people at the Prefecture don’t give him gold pieces enough to lead the life he does. He ought to be shown up and no mistake, and you are quite right in hunting among his acquaintances. By the way, patron, he did not discover any flaws in your disguise?”

“He did not doubt for a moment but what I was the Nabob of Bahour.”

“It’s true that you are a success as an Indian prince, better than I as attendant. The robe and turban suit me well enough. The blacking of my face doesn’t bother me much. But what worries me is to be obliged to deprive myself of talking and smoking my pipe. However, I make up for it when I am with Pigache.”

"Listen!" said the nabob, "I don't go so far as you. I don't accuse Tolbiac, but I want to know exactly why he is so anxious to find the major's heirs. I shall receive, to-morrow, a business agent whom he has promised to send me, and I shall pay this man liberally for his services."

"It will cost you dear, patron."

"What does that matter? You know very well that I am determined to spend my last sou, if necessary, to save Louis. Besides," added M. Lecoq, with a semi-smile, "I won enough at this Englishwoman's this evening to cover the first expenses."

"So much taken from the enemy," said Piédouche, gaily.

"I shall watch these investigations for O'Sullivan's heirs very closely," continued the old man, "and you will help me to watch them. It is also possible that I may decide to ally myself with a creature who is the friend and confidante of the Englishwoman. Through her I shall learn a great deal. I particularly hope that she will tell me precisely who this Arabella Disney is whom Tolbiac has launched into gay society."

Piédouche evinced no enthusiasm over what was said. He did not at all grasp the connection which existed between the gay surroundings of the "policeman"—as he was pleased to call Tolbiac—and the crime of the Rue de l'Arbalète. He did not yet dare to confess it to himself, but it seemed to him that his patron had somewhat failed in his plan of investigation.

"You are now warned," continued Father Lecoq; "it remains with you to act accordingly. I shall charge you with following this business agent whom Tolbiac will send me; but, in the first place, you must, as early as to-morrow, see Pigache, and beg him on my part to get word sent to my son that we are working for him, and that he must not lose courage. I fear all the time that he will kill himself in a fit of despair."

"There's no danger in that direction, patron. He's under the same discipline as others. During the day he doesn't wear a strait-jacket, but at night it's put on him, and he's never left alone. As to the commission you give me, the warder at La Roquette will attend to that. He's a good fellow, and has taken M. Louis into his friendship, and would willingly give three months' pay to be able to tell him he was pardoned."

"I want no pardon," said the old man, in a firm voice; "I want a judgment of rehabilitation. I want the real assassin of the Rue de l'Arbalète to be guillotined, and I want to deliver him to justice myself. And, in order to seize him, it is necessary, in the first place, to find the deaf-mute whom the assassin or his accomplice spirited away. We are now about to reach the Grand Hotel. Not another word! I must again become the Nabob of Bahour, and you are Ali. To-morrow, when I have seen Tolbiac's business man, I will tell you exactly what I expect of you."

VII.

IN India the nabobs rise late, and the one who had lately arrived at the Grand Hotel had seemingly not changed his native habits. He remained invisible until noon, and the faithful Ali, who slept at the door of his master's bedroom, allowed no one to cross the threshold until his excellency had given his orders. The meals were brought in by the servants of the hotel, who withdrew after placing the dishes upon the table. Asiatics of distinction are accustomed to eat alone, and only the black attendant was

allowed to serve the Nabob of Bahour. This attendant fared on what was left, which was, however, ample, for Djafer always ordered a dinner for eight persons.

So the prince and his servant lived an equally retired life. And the almost mysterious existence which they led won them the respect of the hotel servants, who are always strongly inclined to look with contempt upon those who are familiar with them. Besides, they never went out except in a carriage. The equipage which had been hired by the nabob on his arrival, always awaited them at one of the side doors of the hotel, and Ali took his seat beside the handsome old man whom the Parisians admired every day as he drove along the Champs Elysées.

When a visitor presented himself, as often occurred, for rich foreigners are constantly assailed by persons soliciting alms, Ali took the new comer's card, and, without saying a word, carried it to his master, and then still silent, returned to usher in the visitor. This ceremonial was as invariable as the programme of the day.

How did his excellency employ the hours not consecrated to sleep and the promenade? No one at the hotel knew, and they did not much trouble themselves about it, for in these cosmopolitan hotels people are accustomed to all kinds of eccentricities. They presumed, no doubt, that the prince passed the greater part of his time in smoking a superb hookah, which he had brought among his baggage, and which his attendant, Ali, was specially charged with keeping in good condition. But they were altogether mistaken, for if Father Lecoq had bought this utensil during his stay in London, it was solely in view of giving his lodgings an Oriental appearance. He never touched it, neither did Piédouche. Piédouche smoked nothing but a clay pipe, and he deeply regretted that the *régle* he played prevented him from often indulging in this favourite pastime. M. Lecoq sometimes allowed himself a cigar, but he would have been somewhat embarrassed if it had been necessary for him to use the complicated affair so dear to the Orientals.

Towards three o'clock in the afternoon on the day after Arabella Disney's *soirée*, he was shut up with his attendant, and was giving him various instructions, when there came a ring at the door of the apartment. Piédouche knew what he had to do and went to open the door, while Louis' father assumed on a divan the majestic *pose* befitting the Nabob of Bahour.

A moment later, Piédouche, who had not replied a word to the visitor who asked if his excellency would receive a person sent by M. Tolbiac de Tinchebray—Piédouche, imperturbable as the mute of a seraglio, ushered into the sitting-room an individual who was neither prepossessing by his dress nor his physiognomy. He was a horrid little man with a full beard, and long hair, wrinkled like a baked apple, and dressed meanly, almost wretchedly. His coat did not seem to have been made for him, his greased cravat hid all signs of linen, and the grey hat he held in his hand had certainly seen a great deal of service. He appeared neither young nor old. He was without age as it were. A badly trimmed beard covered his chin and cheeks, moustaches fringed his upper lip, and as he wore large green spectacles, it was impossible to see his eyes. A stooping figure, round shoulders, and crooked legs, completed this disagreeable *ensemble*.

The nabob looked at him with so much attention that he forgot to motion him to a seat. It seemed to him somehow that this strange personage must have hired his costume and made up his figure before presenting himself at the Grand Hotel.

Piédouche, after introducing the visitor, had retired to the anteroom, at the same time giving his patron a look which plainly signified : Be on your guard.

"Prince," said the man in a hollow voice, and with a slight German accent, "my name is Holtz, and I am sent to you by M. Tolbiac."

"Yes, I know," replied M. Lecoq, with a princely air. "Sit down."

M. Holtz seated himself on the edge of a chair, laid his hat on his knees, took an ample pinch of snuff from a box-wood snuff-box, blew his nose loudly with a checkered handkerchief, and commenced in this way : "Prince, M. Tolbiac has explained to me what you want. My specialty is precisely to search for missing persons and escheated estates. I am known as having had remarkable success in this kind of operations. So I hope to enable you before long to carry out your generous intentions towards the heirs of Major O'Sullivan."

"I have, indeed, been told that you were very expert," replied the Indian, who tried to prolong the interview so as to obtain time to study this *protégé* of Tolbiac's.

"I am frank in business matters," continued the agent, "and I ought to tell you, prince, that these investigations cost a great deal. There are the expenses of correspondence, deeds to be copied, and agents to be paid. Thus, quite recently, in a Rogers succession, I was unable to succeed in finding the rightful heirs except by examining the histories of all the Rogers in France, and even elsewhere. The interested party made all necessary advances."

"I understand that," said the nabob, looking at M. Holtz's dilapidated hat.

The latter plainly understood the Indian's meaning, for he continued, in an easy tone : "Your excellency thinks, no doubt, that I am too poor to disburse the necessary money. But I hasten to undeceive him. I am poorly dressed, it is true ; that's my system. If I dressed elegantly, I should not be taken for a serious man. I wear shabby clothes because I don't wish to be confounded with triflers. But I am, if not rich, at least comfortably off ; and if I ask you to advance the necessary funds to commence this undertaking, it is because I don't wish to depart from my usual course. My principle is that the client ought to pay the first expenses of the campaign."

"We shall have no trouble on that point," said the Nabob of Bahour, smiling. "You might even have dispensed with your profession of faith, for M. Tolbiac had already informed me that you never embarked without provisions."

"Provisions is the right word, and I admire your excellency's knowledge of our language."

"I have spoken it since my childhood, and in Pondicherry, where I have spent my life, I rarely saw any other Europeans than Frenchmen. But let us return to our affair. To commence with, will ten thousand francs be enough for you ?" asked Djafer, while taking a bundle of bank-notes from under one of the cushions of the divan on which he sat.

"Perfectly," replied M. Holtz. "However, when the amount is exhausted, I will render you an account of the use I have made of it, and then, if I have not yet succeeded, you can add a supplement."

"That's understood. But pray take this in the first place."

The man quickly extended his hand to receive a package of ten notes of a thousand francs each, fastened together with a pin : and then hastened

to stow them away in the side pocket of his shabby coat. In executing these two movements with remarkable celerity, he nevertheless held down his head, and, for the first time, the nabob was able to detect his eyes behind the spectacles which screened them. "Good!" he thought. "Now I know what to expect." And he quietly said aloud: "I may hope then that you will shortly bring me some information respecting the relatives of my father's best friend."

"Within a very few days, prince. The agency I control is on such a footing that I am enabled to reach my object very quickly. It has ramifications throughout the whole world. I have, besides, reason to believe that the late O'Sullivan's descendants of the collateral lines, live either in France or England. But, before commencing this work, prince, I have a question to ask you."

"And before I reply to it, I am obliged to leave you for a moment. I have some orders to give to my attendant, and I won't inflict upon you the annoyance of listening to a dialogue in Hindustani not a word of which you would understand." So saying the Nabob of Bahour rose, slowly crossing the sitting-room, and passed into the anteroom, without forgetting to close the communicating door.

Ali was at his post, as stiff and motionless as became a slave on guard at his master's threshold, but quite ready to become Piédouche again if his duties required it. Father Lecoq went to him, and whispered close to his ear: "Do you know who that rascal is?"

"An agent of Tolbiac's, of course!" replied ex-number 29 in a low voice.

"Better than that, my boy," continued the false nabob, "it is Tolbiac himself."

VIII.

"THAT isn't possible!" said Piédouche. "Tolbiac isn't old; he isn't deformed; he has no sign of a beard, and he's a little bald."

"I'm sure it is he," continued M. Lecoq.

"Then he's 'A 1' at disguising himself. Arranged as he is, he could enter the Prefecture, go through the criminal investigation office, and no one would detect the fraud."

"Perhaps so. But when he has dealings with me, he has to do with an old stager. He leaned forward. I was enabled to see his eyes behind his spectacles. That sufficed, for I knew him in an instant."

"Provided he didn't also recognise you."

"I defy him to do that. I passed three hours with him last evening in a drawing-room lighted by forty tapers, and I tell you he eyed me from head to foot. I stood the test and he takes me for a real nabob. If he knew that I was Father Lecoq he would keep clear of me."

"The fact is, I ask myself why he came himself instead of sending an agent."

"Because he doesn't wish to let any one else into his game, and that proves that I am on the right track. If the major's estate did not have very great interest and importance for him, he would not have given himself so much trouble. But this is not the time to chat; he is waiting for me, and is perhaps listening behind the door."

"That wouldn't help him much, because we have talked so low."

"Good! But let us hurry. How long do you need to get a clean face,

dress yourself in plain clothes, and go and stroll on the boulevard in front of the entrance downstairs."

"Twenty minutes, patron. The dye I use to make a negro of myself sticks like the deuce. If I were only required to disguise myself that would go quicker, but I have to change my skin—"

"Don't be alarmed. I will keep him twenty-five minutes; that will give you five minutes more."

"And when he shows his nose on the side-walk I am to follow him, that's understood."

"You will follow him till he goes to his den. And I have an idea that he will not go to his residence, Rue Godot."

"To the Englishwoman's, perhaps."

"That would astonish me. He must have an abode expressly for the purpose of disguising himself, and I fancy that if we could find it we should learn a good deal. And so keep your eyes open and don't loiter on the way. When you have left I will ring to let the hotel people know that I shall not go out to-day, and I shall shut myself up till you return."

"You think of everything, patron. It's a pleasure to work with you."

"Go and clean and dress yourself, chatterbox," said Father Lecoq.

And turning on his heels, he returned as stealthily as a wolf to the door of the sitting-room, and opened it again. M. Holtz had not moved from his place. He was still seated on the extreme edge of his chair, and on perceiving the nabob he rose as though he had been shot up by a spring.

Djafer made a sign for him to be seated, re-assumed his majestic *pose* on the divan, and then said, in an engaging tone: "You had something to ask of me, sir?"

"Yes, prince," replied M. Tolbiac's envoy bowing; "some information concerning your affair which I should like to have before I commence proceedings. Yesterday evening you explained your intentions, very clearly to my honourable client, M. de Tinchebray, who acquainted me with them this morning. You informed him that you wished to enrich the members of the O'Sullivan family, and as he observed to you that one of them would already be immensely wealthy as the deceased had left ten millions which would fall to his nearest of kin of the collateral line, you declared you would give all your wealth to the others, to those who had remained poor, and exclude from your liberality the relative who inherited from the major."

"Such is, indeed, my determination. I have not changed it."

"I have no doubt of that, but I ask permission to submit to you a point which you have, perhaps, not thought of."

"Speak, sir."

"It is probable that several collateral relatives of the late O'Sullivan are still living. It is even to be supposed that these collateral relatives are somewhat numerous, for I already know that the major had four sisters, all of whom married. If this is so, nothing will prevent you from carrying out your generous plans. The nearest of kin will receive the major's ten millions, and, thanks to you, prince, the others will have nothing to want for. But it might also happen that but a single relative of the major's survives. As he would be entitled to the whole of his grand-uncle's or great-grand-uncle's fortune, he could, then, very well do without yours. Should you still persist in bequeathing it to him?"

The nabob reflected for a moment, and then, weighing his words, replied:

"That idea had never presented itself to my mind. It seemed to me that

a family composed of four branches would not be reduced to a single head. And I should prefer, I admit, to find it still numbering several representatives, for I am wealthy enough to enrich them all, and it would please me to make many happy. But if the O'Sullivan family is reduced to but one individual, that is no reason why I should reconsider my intentions. Gratitude is not measured by social position, and mine is due to any member of the race of the brave officer who saved my father's life."

While talking, the nabob closely watched the agent, and he thought that he perceived that these words were extremely agreeable to him.

M. Holtz straightened himself up as though he had been relieved of a burden, and re-adjusted his spectacles, which had been disarranged by a slight movement of the muscles of his face. "Prince," he exclaimed, "this sentiment does you honour, and now that I am completely informed on a very important point, I have only to commence my operations. They will be conducted with all the zeal and intelligence I am capable of, and I—"

"Do you think, sir, that they will be of long duration?"

"They will require a certain lapse of time. The difficulties are enormous."

"I ask you this question because I am in a hurry to succeed. In the first place my stay in Europe cannot be prolonged indefinitely, and, above all, I don't wish to defer acquitting the debt contracted by my father. For that reason, I have a proposal to make you. We have not yet agreed upon the exact amount I am to give you when you succeed. You will fix the amount yourself. Whatever it may be I accept it in advance; but, I offer to double it if you succeed within a certain time, for instance, within a—"

"Within a month," interrupted the agent.

"I should prefer it to be within a fortnight."

"A fortnight, that is short. But I will exert myself to satisfy your excellency. And not to lose a minute, I will take my leave of him."

The false nabob looked at the clock, and calculating that Piédouche had had time to change his skin, he no longer sought to retain M. Holtz, who added, on rising: "Prince, I shall have the honour of sending you to-morrow a little document which I hope you will not refuse to sign. Your excellency knows that business is business, and he will not take exception to the fact that I prefer a written contract to a verbal agreement."

"I shall take no exceptions in the case," said the Nabob of Bahour, smiling. "And so that you may fully reassure yourself, I authorise you to inquire at Rothschild's as to the amount of my credit there."

"That is altogether unnecessary, prince," exclaimed the false agent, who already knew what he had to depend upon, having that very morning informed himself as to the Indian's disposable fortune. And it was a good round sum, for M. Lecoq's entire means had been used to swell his banking account. "It now remains for me to give your excellency a receipt for the ten thousand francs he has just advanced me," resumed the so-called Holtz.

"You can add it to the contract you will send me to-morrow," said the nabob. And he rose to signify to his visitor that the audience was ended.

Tolbiac—for it was really he, and Father Lecoq was not mistaken—Tolbiac had nothing more to say, and, indeed, he was extremely well satisfied with the interview he had just had with the generous Asiatic. He bowed very low and went out backwards.

M. Lecoq escorted him as far as the door of the sitting-room, and on seeing that his black attendant was no longer at his post in the ante-chamber, he was careful to remark: "A stay in Paris spoils the most faithful servants. It is now a quarter of an hour since I ordered my major-domo to go and drop a letter into the box of the hotel, and he has not yet returned. If I remain here for three months, I should be able to do nothing with him. Fortunately, sir, you will not have to employ such a dilatory fellow in finding the major's heirs," he added gaily.

The spurious M. Holtz again promised to succeed in a fortnight, retired, and briskly descended the stairs. When he set his foot on the boulevard outside the hotel, Piédouche had already been promenading there for ten minutes or so.

IX.

Ex-No. 29 was expeditious in everything. The life he had formerly led in his regiment, and the detective service, had accustomed him to getting quickly and neatly out of a difficulty, no matter what it might be. To change his clothes, and even his skin, was but child's play; and he had taken but a quarter of an hour to turn Ali, the blackamoor into a spruce little citizen of the suburbs of Paris, neatly dressed, cleanly shaved, and properly titivated. It must be mentioned that, on installing himself in Lecoq's suite of rooms at the Grand Hotel, he had carefully reserved himself a little chamber, which served him as a wardrobe and dressing-room. He kept the key in his pocket, and no one entered it but himself. Some of the servants of the hotel even pretended that a bayadère, who had been brought from Bahour by the nabob, lived there. But as this bayadère must have been hidden in a trunk to have entered the hotel without being seen, no one believed this silly story, and the black major-domo was left to himself. The fact is Piédouche had stowed away in this room all the paraphernalia of his profession. While he was in London with M. Lecoq preparing the campaign, he had purchased such accessories as he expected would be useful in his several rôles. Thus he possessed various costumes, an assortment of wigs, mixtures for dyeing, and chemicals for removing the dyes. He had taken similar precautions for his master, in case the Indian Prince should wish to turn Frenchman again at any moment. A master in the art of disguise, Piédouche had that day surpassed himself. By a turn of the hand he had assumed the dress, manners and appearance of an honest citizen of the suburbs. He sauntered about the boulevard in front of the hotel, admiring the carriages which came out of the courtyard filled with beautiful American ladies; contemplated the engravings of the illustrated papers displayed at the surrounding kiosques, and, in short, loitered about so naturally, that it was impossible not to take him for a petty capitalist with nothing to do.

But, in spite of the free-and-easy air he assumed, the ex-detective did not lose sight of the hotel entrance for a single moment, and his practised eye scrutinised every individual who came out. He did not have to wait long. At the end of ten minutes he saw the ugly personage who called himself M. Holtz gliding through the groups assembled round the door. He at once eyed him from head to foot, to seek for a defect in his cuirass for he wanted his revenge. When Tolbiac presented himself to ask an interview with the nabob, he had succeeded in passing incognito, and Piédouche was angry with him for being so well disguised. However, this time his eyes

did not fail him. "His beard is badly fixed to the right cheek," he growled, "and his wig is badly adjusted behind. If I had looked at him sharper in the anteroom, I should have recognised him. That's what comes of doing no work for three months: a fellow gets rusty. And he has already abandoned his crooked legs and round shoulders. Too soon, my good little man, too soon. You don't suspect that I'm ogling you at a distance; but if you knew your business, you wouldn't straighten up so quick."

While ex-No. 29 studied Tolbiac like a connoisseur, the inheritance hunter went slowly across the pavement, with the evident intention of crossing the boulevard. At the same time he looked at the people immediately around him over his spectacles; but the little citizen from the suburbs did not attract his attention.

"I had foreseen that he wouldn't go home when he came out," said Piédouche to himself. "The Rue Godot, where he lives, is to the right, and he seems inclined to start in the direction of the Tuileries. Neither is he going to the Englishwoman's, for she resides in the Boulevard Haussmann. Where is he going then? We shall have to see. It would be funny if it was—But never mind. The thing now is to follow him properly." And Piédouche, holding down his head as though he wanted to count the paving stones, crossed the boulevard a little to the left and some distance behind the so-called Holtz.

The latter stepped on to the sidewalk of the southern side of the boulevard, and started towards the Rue de la Paix. Piédouche followed him composedly, and soon he saw Tolbiac stop, take out his watch and look at the time. "It seems that he is afraid of being late," thought ex-No. 29. "He is, perhaps, going to take a cab from the stand. There are at least twenty there, so I shan't be troubled to find one also. And, my faith, I prefer not having to follow him on foot, for I haven't the legs I had once."

But Piédouche was mistaken. Tolbiac did not take a cab, he turned the corner of the boulevard, and, without hesitation, went down the Rue de la Paix.

"Go on, my little one, go," said Piédouche, between his teeth. "You'll never get me to believe that you are thinking of promenading under the chestnut trees of the Tuileries garden—you'll have to go somewhere else."

At the same time, he was careful to cross over on to the opposite side of the way, in case the false agent should take a fancy to retrace his steps, which he did not fail to do.

He stopped before Siraudin's shop to give himself an opportunity of slyly studying the people around him. And then not perceiving any one who looked suspicious, he started off again. Piédouche had posted himself close to Messrs. Cuvilier's windows where foreign wines and colonial commodities are displayed, and seemed to be absorbed in contemplating a barrel of caviar. Tolbiac passed quite close to him as he turned along the Rue Neuve Saint-Augustin, but he paid no attention to the lover of choice groceries. The make-believe citizen let the false agent get a little start. As the Rue Neuve Saint-Augustin is narrower than the Rue de la Paix, he did not wish to get too close to his game. However, when Tolbiac had gained twenty paces Piédouche started on again, always at the same moderate pace.

At that time the demolitions for the Avenue du Nouvel-Opera had not begun, and at the intersection of the Rue Neuve Saint-Augustin and the Rue Louis-le-Grand there was an old house with no shops in it. This was a

difficult point for a tracker to pass without attracting attention. Piédouche before reaching it again slackened his pace, and—for want of something better—began to examine the bills of the lodging-houses which abound in that neighbourhood. Tolbiac, meanwhile, did not hurry himself. He went along close to the walls, no doubt to keep in the shade, for the sun already had considerable power, and he no longer looked behind him.

All at once Piédouchie saw that he was quickening his pace to reach the corner of the Rue d'Antin, and ex-No. 29 stepped out in his turn for fear of being left too far behind. He did not anticipate the mishap which thwarted his skilful manœuvres. A cab was coming from the Rue d'Antin at a slow trot. It was empty. Tolbiac made a sign to the driver, who stopped; he then quickly opened the door and jumped in.

"Ah! the scoundrel!" said Piédouche between his teeth. "He didn't take a cab on the boulevard because he was afraid some one might take another and follow him. My word of honour, this is too much."

The cab, which was a closed one, turned round to go in the direction it had already come from; and, until the horse had completed its evolution, Piédouche was unable to stir, for if he had started to catch it up, Tolbiac, who could have seen him through the widows, would certainly have asked himself why this citizen, who was strolling along so quietly, should all at once take a notion to start off at the top of his speed.

So M. Lecoq's emissary was obliged to chew his bit for a few moments, and he stood, with his nose in the air and his ear on the alert, pretending to read the signs, and listening for the rumble of wheels which would announce to him the providential arrival of another cab. But the street was as silent as it was deserted. It was very warm, and the cab-drivers, asleep on their boxes, did not willingly leave their stands to go marauding at haphazard. It was, indeed, extraordinary luck that Tolbiac had stumbled on one. The vehicle he had just taken possession of turned its back on Piédouche and started towards the Place de la Bourse. Ex-No. 29 again looked to see if there was another cab coming to his succour, and then, no longer hoping for an interposition of Providence in his behalf, he bravely made up his mind and started as fast as his legs could carry him in pursuit of the vehicle which was bearing Tolbiac away.

X.

FOR a man on foot to follow a cab is something which had perhaps never been seen. Only Piédouche would have started off on such a seemingly senseless expedition. But he had not served in the artillery train like his friend Pigache, and did not need to be in a saddle to cover ground rapidly. He had served in the marine infantry in Cochin China and Senegal, in wild countries where halting-places were far apart and unpleasant. And since his return to France, daily exercise in chasing rascals through the streets of Paris had kept him in excellent condition—as one would say in racing parlance. His limbs were still of iron, his muscles of steel, and his chest would have given some points to a blacksmith's bellows. Nevertheless, in spite of all these advantages, if Tolbiac had only been in his blue brougham, drawn by his black horse, he would have had no trouble in distancing the former colonial foot-soldier. Fortunately, the heir-hunter had had the bad luck to stumble on a worm-eaten vehicle, harnessed to a broken-winded nag, and driven by a Jehu who was half asleep. The sorry equipage which

conveyed him went jogging along, and so Piédouche was able to follow without losing ground.

What worried M. Lecoq's agent was much less the pace he was compelled to keep up than the costume he had chosen. His nankeen pantaloons, pump shoes, maroon coloured coat and wide-brimmed hat did very well for a sauntering citizen, but they hardly suited a man who was running like a lunatic. He was afraid he would be remarked, and he was not wrong, for several passers-by already began to stop and look at him. There were even some who turned to follow him. "They will finish by crying 'stop thief!'" thought the poor fellow. And the fact is that in Paris a man who runs instead of walking at once attracts the attention even of the least inquisitive wayfarers, and this is especially the case when he is neither of an age nor figure to run for pleasure. And, in that case, he has only to reach the corner of a square for a police officer to arrest him and ask him, more or less politely, why he is going so fast.

Now Piédouche did not care, and for good reasons, to enter into an explanation with any representative of the authorities. In the first place, he would have lost his "game," and then again he might be consigned to a station-house.

However, he determined not to lose sight of the cab, especially as he had not been able to read its number painted in red, microscopic figures on the back panel. For want of this information, if the vehicle gained on him, Piédouche would have no chance of knowing where Tolbiac had gone on leaving the Grand Hotel. And besides, in order to acquire positive information on this important point, it would not have sufficed to read the number, remember it, search out the driver and ask him where he took the "fare" he picked up in the Rue Neuve-Saint-Augustin, for Tolbiac might very well change vehicles, *en route*. The nabob's visitor was a sly dog, quite capable of driving to the entrance of some passage with two exits, dismissing his cab, and taking another to his real destination.

So it was requisite not to abandon the chase. And to continue it with any chance of success, it was necessary to invent at once a system of running which would not seem too extraordinary to passers by. So Piédouche determined on a sort of loping gait which he knew how to assume marvelously well, a gait by which he covered considerable ground without seeming to be in a hurry. He had recourse at the same time to a certain style of pantomime executed with the arms, a pantomime adopted by persons who run after omnibuses. There were no omnibuses in the street followed by Tolbiac's cab, but the passers-by did not give that a thought, and some of them came to the conclusion that this citizen, who was in such a hurry, had after all no bad intentions. Others thought that perhaps he trotted in this way because, having been too warm, he feared that he might become chilled.

There was, however, a horrid urchin who began bawling: "I say, is it your wife who is running away in that cab? Keep on running, old duffer! you won't catch her, but it will keep the blood circulating in your legs!"

In spite of the yelpings of this cur, Piédouche arrived without molestation at the corner of the Rue de Richelieu, round which the vehicle, twenty seconds ahead of him, had turned on its way towards the Palais Royal. The pursuit now became less difficult. The traffic being greater, the cab was often obliged to slacken its speed, sometimes even to stop altogether, and these incidents gave the pursuer time to draw breath.

Besides, the omnibuses of the Orleans line follow the whole length of this street, and Piédouche had now a certain pretext for running. He had the

right to say to anyone who questioned him : "I am going to take the omnibus."

And when he thought he noticed that the people were astonished by his persistence in pursuing the huge yellow vehicle which bore the inscription "Full" in blue letters above the doorway, he gesticulated and pointed to the knife-board as though he hoped to find a place there in spite of the negative signs made by the conductor. However, he certainly did not hope to clamber up outside. His hopes were based on meeting an empty cab, and if this chance was offered, he intended to jump into the vehicle and bid the driver to follow the conveyance occupied by M. Tolbiac, which kept along at a slow trot. But this much-desired cab did not present itself. Of all those that passed, not one was empty. It might have been thought that the drivers had passed the word along on purpose to annoy Piédouche. He had not yet lost his wind, but he already felt that if the jaunt were to last an hour or two, he would not be able to keep up the pace.

Where was Tolbiac going? Piédouche did not know, nor did he make any conjectures on the subject. On the other hand, he was persuaded that Tolbiac did not imagine he was being followed. If he had suspected it, he would have had offered a gratuity in order to induce his driver to whip up his nag. This was of course a trump card in Piédouche's hand, but it did not insure his winning the game.

On reaching the Place Louvois, he found himself in a new predicament. The conductor of the omnibus, he had followed so far, pitied the poor fellow who had been panting and swallowing dust for the last five minutes. A lady had just got out. So he pulled the strap, and the huge vehicle stopped.

"There's a vacant seat. Don't you see the conductor making you signs?" said a gentleman, whom Piédouche had just jostled.

The false attendant of the false Nabob of Bahour had not the least desire to profit by the opportunity. "Ah, dear me! I have made a mistake. I thought it was an omnibus of the Vaugirard line," he exclaimed, raising his arms above his head. And so saying he stopped, while the vehicle started again on its way.

Tolbiac's cab was close beside this omnibus, and Piédouche was within ten paces of it. Thanks to the hubbub which is never lacking in the Rue de Richelieu, everything went well till the Place du Théâtre Français was reached, and here, at last, there stood an unoccupied victoria. Piédouche took it by storm, whispered a couple of words into the driver's ear, and all the change he had in his pocket into his hand. The driver understood, and at once took his place behind the closed cab, which he did not allow to get away from him.

Piédouche now felt more at ease. Success was assured, and he had a right to tell himself with pride that perseverance is always rewarded. As soon as he had recovered his breath, and he had real need to do so, he began to reflect on the different denouements which this piece, played in a couple of cabs, might have. An idea which had already presented itself to him again occurred to his mind. "By the road Tolbiac's taking, a man can go to the Rue de l'Arbalète," he said between his teeth. "He's dressed like a poor fellow, and if he were to show himself there why the coal-dealer himself wouldn't recognise him. But on the other hand, what could he go there for? I don't think he is good for much, but I haven't the same opinion of him that Father Lecoq has. Any way," concluded Piédouche, "we are going to see."

XI.

TOLBIAC'S cab slowly crossed the Place du Carrousel and the Pont des Saint Pères, and then turning to the left followed the Quai Malaquais. It went on gently, swinging with the trotting of the horse, which the driver dozing on his seat, did not dream of touching up with his whip. Thus the victoria had no trouble in following it, and Piédouche said to himself: "If Tolbiac allows himself to be drawn along at the pace of a huckster's cart, it's evident that he's in no hurry. But where is he going? May the devil burn me if I can make it out. Still it's certain that he is not riding to take the air. Perhaps he has rented a lodging in this neighbourhood, which he uses when he disguises himself. He is being taken there, perhaps, merely to undress himself, and get into his dandy skin again. Why, here we are at the Quai Conti! Father Lecoq lived here in his happy days. Poor man! there has been a change in his existence and no mistake."

The victoria was at this moment passing in front of the Institute. "Ah! dash it!" exclaimed Piédouche, "suppose this scoundrel of a Tolbiac were to go and ferret about in the patron's apartment. He is quite capable of doing so—Yes," he continued, less warmly, "but for what purpose? M. Lecoq is too cunning to have left compromising papers there. Tolbiac would have his trouble for nothing and he doesn't like to lose his time. Ah! his cab is going past the house. That idea of mine was nonsense—he's going straight towards the Jardin des Plantes. Good! but that does not tell me where he's bound for. We are no longer on the road to the Rue de l'Arbalète: and, besides, I wouldn't mind betting but what for the time being, he thinks very little about the lady of the cottage. The patron gets a heap of ideas in his head. As to me, I can't understand what connection there can be between young Lecoq's affair and the English major's inheritance. There are moments when I even think that we are poking our fingers in our eyes, and have gone off on a false track. After all," concluded Piédouche, snapping his fingers, "that doesn't concern me; Father Lecoq knows more about it than I do; and wherever he tells me to go, I *shall* go. Passive obedience, I know nothing but that."

While he was engaged in this monologue, the cab had followed the Quai des Augustins and the Quai Saint Michel. It now reached the Quai de la Tournelle. The victoria kept its distance, and Piédouche no longer feared that Tolbiac would escape him. The question was to know how this jaunt would end. At last they passed the wine entrepôt and then the gate of the Jardin des Plantes.

At this moment ex-No. 29 remembered that the terminus of the Orleans rail-road was close by, and that among the employes of the line there was a switchman who knew Tolbiac. In front of Mazas, on the evening of the mute's escape, Pierre Cambremer had told the two officers his grievances against the man who had so nearly caused the death of his dear little Marthe. Piédouche appealed to his memory, and ended by remembering that this same Cambremer had told him that Tolbiac had talked to him about an inheritance which the child would have some right to. "This time I think I've hit it," he exclaimed. "Tolbiac has disguised himself because he's now going to see the switchman. This happens well. Cambremer will tell me all that the scamp says to him."

On reaching the Pont d'Austerlitz, the cab continued to go straight

ahead. Piédouche asked himself if the detective were going to leave Paris, but he was soon reassured. From a distance he saw M. Tolbiac protrude his head and one arm outside of the vehicle, pull the driver by his coat-tails and engage in a brief dialogue with him, the result of which was that the carriage abruptly turned to the right and entered the courtyard of the station.

"I guessed right," thought Piédouche. "He is going to see this fellow Cambremer. Nevertheless, it's strange that he gets out in front of the passengers' waiting-rooms. Switchmen are not usually found there. At all events I shall alight and manage so as not to lose sight of him, but without attracting his attention."

To arrive at this double result, he had the victoria stopped in front of the gate, and, without further noticing the driver, whom he had paid in advance, he slipped into the yard and walked diagonally towards the steps which Tolbiac was at this moment mounting. "It's fortunate he's not going to the company's offices for information," said Piédouche to himself, "for I should have been obliged to wait at the door."

Meanwhile, the false M. Holtz had dismissed his cab. Piédouche saw him pass through one of the numerous doors which open into the covered gallery where baggage is received. So he followed his example, and, entering, watched the false agent without his suspecting it. This was not difficult, as there were a great many people there and considerable bustle. Porters were going here and there, carrying trunks on their shoulders, or pushing trucks loaded with baggage before them. The seats against the walls were occupied by passengers of both sexes, awaiting the departure of various trains. There were women surrounded by numerous children and enormous packages; men carrying their entire wardrobe in a pocket-handkerchief; and bottles of wine or brandy in baskets. All these good folks had arrived an hour or more too soon, and had taken possession of the station as though they were going to bivouac there till morning. They relieved the tedium of waiting by refreshing themselves with alcoholic liquors, and from appearances one might have thought it was a Tartar encampment.

Tolbiac might very well have taken his place in one of the groups. Attired as he was he would not have marred the picture. But he had little inclination to fraternise with these poor devils; and, without even pausing to contemplate the picturesque tableau, he passed into the central gallery, where the ticket-offices are situated. Here there was no crowd, although the ticket-office was open for the passengers of a train about to start. Gentlemen dressed in the style of country land-owners came in, took their tickets and passed on. Elegantly-dressed ladies paid first-class fares with daintily gloved hands, bought a novel or an illustrated paper at a neighbouring stand, and went at once to the waiting-room.

As for Tolbiac he had drawn himself up into a corner, and was stealthily watching the people about to take the train; they were evidently not going far, for they carried no baggage. Piédouche thought for a moment that the false M. Holtz was going to take the train as well, and he had determined to do the same rather than abandon the pursuit. But instead of going to the ticket-office, M. Holtz pretended to be absorbed in reading the names of the stations inscribed on the walls. Still it could not be supposed that he had come to the terminus for the mere pleasure of studying the topography of the Orleans railway line. Piédouche, who watched him from a distance, was trying to find an explanation for this singular behaviour, when, all at once, he perceived a couple whom he little expected to meet.

The coal-dealer of the Rue de l'Arbalète and his wife were making a most noisy entry into the station. They both bent under the weight of packages, baskets, mattresses, saucepans, and other household utensils, which they did not mean to be separated from on the road.

"Is it here that places are taken for Aurillac?" asked the Auvergnat with an accent which it would be in vain to try and reproduce, the alphabet not containing letters which could represent the sounds he uttered.

"Yes, in an hour and a half," replied a porter.

"That suits me," continued the coal-man. "Like that, we shall have time to break a crust before we pack ourselves in a third-class carriage. Ain't that so, Jeannette?"

The coal-woman opened her mouth to approve of this amiable project, but, instead of speaking, she uttered a groan which resembled a stifled cry. She was looking in amazement at a tall, slender woman, an elegantly dressed blonde, who had just alighted from a luxurious equipage, and was walking in the direction of the ticket-office.

"What's up?" asked the husband.

The wife was about to reply, but at this moment a porter invited the encumbered couple to go and wait in the baggage-room till it was time for their train to leave. They allowed themselves to be pushed in there, and Piédouche, as they passed before him, heard Jeannette say to her husband: "Ah! holy Virgin! it's the servant of our street—the Englishwoman who ran off on the evening they killed her mistress."

"Take your seats, gentlemen, the train starts," called an inspector in charge of the waiting-rooms.

The lady whom the coal-woman thought she recognized had already secured her ticket, and hurried towards the passage leading to the platform. At the same moment Tolbiac left the corner he had been lurking in, and also went towards the door.

Piédouche had been so much surprised by the words of the coal-dealer's wife, that he had turned towards her and ceased to observe Tolbiac. He quickly looked for him again, but could only see his back. The false M. Holtz exhibited a ticket to the inspector, who quickly let him pass, and he then disappeared into the passage which leads from the waiting-rooms to the platform.

As for the elegant lady, she had preceded him on the way, and was no longer to be seen.

Piédouche had not anticipated this incident, but he did not lose his head. He hurried towards the ticket-office, and arrived there just as the employé put his hand on the sliding board to close the aperture. "A ticket!" he cried.

"You well deserve to be refused," said the clerk. "Here, you've been walking about for the last hour, and you wait till the last moment."

"That isn't my fault," stammered Piédouche.

"Come! hurry up!—what destination? what class?"

"I don't know—that's to say, if—give me a ticket for the same place and the same class as the gentleman who took the last—after a lady—"

"Ah! that's the way of it!" exclaimed the agent, and he hastily closed the window in the face of ex-No. 29, who began beating on it with his fist.

"I say," continued the man inside, "just keep quiet, or I shall send for a police officer."

"I tell you that I must go—the train's still in the station: if you won't give me a ticket, let me get into a carriage—the first at hand—I'll pay when I get out."

"Get out where? You don't even know where you want to go. Look here! do you want me to tell you? You look to me as though you belonged to the police. Very well, we don't, we others; and we are not obliged to help you to follow a man whom you are spying. He has escaped you. So much the better for him, and so much the worse for you. You ought to have kept a tighter hold on him, and you would then have known where he was going."

Piédouche felt that the employé really took him for a detective, and he knew by experience that the officials of the secret service inspire all classes of citizens with a strong antipathy. However, he had an inspiration. "I a spy!" he exclaimed. "Why, I detest them as much as you do, the villains. Don't you understand, then, that if I run after that fellow, my wife is the cause of it."

"How the cause of it?"

"Yes, he has taken her from me, and is going away with her. Let me pass, I beg of you."

"That's another thing," said the employé, laughing. "But what do you want me to do about it?"

"You can tell your comrade to open the gate for me."

"That would do you no good, for the train's starting."

And, in fact, a prolonged whistle sounded in the ears of the unfortunate Piédouche, and this whistle was followed by intermittent piston strokes as the locomotive steamed away. It was all over. Tolbiac was on his way to an unknown destination, and, this time, it was useless to think of following him.

"How far does it go, this train?" asked Piédouche, who was terribly enraged.

"As far as Orleans, but it stops at all the stations, and there are twenty-three, without counting junctions. I advise you to buy a guide-book, if you care to find your wife," said the employé, in a jeering tone.

If detectives always inspire repulsion, husbands who have been deceived by their wives always provoke laughter, and are hardly any more lucky than "*mouchards*" in finding people disposed to be agreeable to them.

Piédouche, once more repulsed, left the ticket-office and gave himself up to his reflections, which were by no means gay, for after expending so much tact in the pursuit, so much talent in disguising himself, so much courage in following a horse on the trot, everything ended in a most ridiculous failure. It was enough to vex one, and the unfortunate attendant asked himself if he should dare to appear before his nabob and acquaint him with the pitiable result of this man-hunt. Besides, he could not explain to himself how Tolbiac had managed to slip through his fingers. He had watched him from the time he had alighted from the cab, and was sure that he had purchased no ticket at the office. How was it, then, that he had been allowed to pass through and take the train?

"He must have a season-ticket," thought Piédouche, "or else he merely had a pass from the Prefecture. But no, for in that case he would have been obliged to have got it indorsed at the company's office; and, on the other hand, I don't believe they sell season tickets on the Orleans line. Still he must have had a ticket, and who the deuce could have given it to him?"

After reflection, the officer clapped his hand to his forehead, and remarked: "Suppose it was that woman! Why, yes, she was not more than two steps from him when I was foolish enough to turn round; he must have joined her, and she slipped the ticket into his hand; she must

have got two at the office; he didn't pretend to know her, but he has joined her again in the train, and they have gone off together. Ah! if I had only suspected it, I shouldn't have lost my journey. Now the most important point, is to chat with the coal-dealers."

Piédouche knew that the Auvergnat couple had more than an hour to wait, for he had not lost a word of their conversation with the porter whom the husband had asked for information respecting the train to Aurillac. This was more time than he needed for questioning the woman. However, he began by following the advice given to him by the ticket-clerk. He bought a time-table and studied the running of the trains and the names of the stations, for he had not given up the idea of catching Tolbiac on his return, and he wanted to know when the trains by which Tolbiac could come back to Paris would arrive. Supplied with this information he passed into the baggage-room, and at the further end he discovered the Auvergnat couple, seated side by side on one of their mattresses, and devouring a sausage seasoned with garlic, which they moistened with Argenteuil wine, drinking by turns from the bottle.

The difficulty was to find a pretext for approaching them without awakening their suspicions. Auvergnats are naturally circumspect, and don't willingly tell their secrets to the first comer. So what could be done to obtain from them an explanation on a very delicate subject, especially as they were going away in an hour's time? The most able diplomat loses all his advantages when he is obliged to be abrupt in his negotiations. And, more than this, Piédouche knew very well that coal-dealers, and other citizens of the same category, by no means care to be mixed up in a judicial affair, as they always fear that they will compromise themselves. This fellow of the Rue de l'Arbalète had been very careful not to express himself decidedly when the presiding judge at the Assizes had asked him if the prisoner was the same gentleman who often visited the murdered Englishwoman. And before the jury, as before the examining magistrate, the woman had not been any more explicit than her husband. If, at the station, she had ventured to exclaim that she recognized Mary Fassitt's servant, it was because she did not suspect her words would be heard by any one interested in them. It was now necessary to get her to repeat her declaration, and state it more precisely, and Piédouche wished to ask the Auvergnat couple something even more than this. He knew what importance Father Lecoq attached to finding the servant who had disappeared on the very evening of the murder. And from the view he took of the affair, he had often said to himself that if they could put their hand on a witness whose inexplicable absence had not a little contributed to the mystery of the cottage affair, they would obtain a great deal of information. So in his eyes, this meeting of the coal-dealers with the Englishwoman's former maid was quite providential, and the hope of being able to profit by this circumstance almost consoled him for having lost Tolbiac's trail.

Tolbiac, after all, would necessarily return from the unknown locality where he had gone, and return soon, for he was not equipped for a long journey. And, as it was now certain that he had gone to some station between Paris and Orleans, it would in the future be easy to organize an efficacious surveillance over that part of the line.

Piédouche also decided that, for the present, he had better devote himself to an investigation anent the servant girl, who, if the coal-woman were not mistaken, was cutting a fine figure in the world. He regretted not having looked at her as she entered the station, and while she walked

towards the ticket-office. But at that moment he was only thinking of Tolbiac, and had eyes for no one else. He had noticed the lady's figure, height, and toilet, but he was not in a position to recognise her features should he find himself, later on, face to face with her. "At any cost, I must prevent these Auvergnats from leaving for Aurillac," he said to himself, while manœuvring so as to approach the couple.

XII.

By walking round about the coal-man and his wife, Piédouche finally attracted their attention. They did not recognise him in the least, although he had once gone dressed as a working-man, to chat with the dealer at his door ; but they were astonished to see this citizen glance at them pleasantly, and as he seemed to be in easy circumstances, they looked at him kindly in return.

The husband was naturally fond of fun, and the woman was by no means of a melancholy disposition. Besides, the Argenteuil wine had put them in a good-humour, and they laughed without knowing why, but just for the pleasure of laughing. It was wonderful to see their white teeth glisten in the midst of their black faces, and their feet, solidly booted, beat time on the floor. A little more and they would have got up and danced a *bourrée*. They were both young. The man a robust fellow, just over thirty, and the woman by no means bad looking.

Piédouche said to himself that, with so happy and so well-matched a couple, it ought to be easy to get along, and so, to open the acquaintance, he exclaimed : "I'll bet you, my children, that we are from the same part of the country."

"Don't bet, you'll lose," retorted the husband. "You are not from Auvergne, for if you were you wouldn't talk like a Parisian."

"But I am partly. My mother was from there."

"From Aurillac, may be."

"No, from Issoire."

"That don't matter ; Issoire isn't far from our place. Then we've both won and we'll go and pay for the drinks."

"No, no ; I've lost, and I'll pay for both."

"Citizen, that isn't to be refused, for you look like a good fellow. Ain't that so, Jeannette ?"

"Why, yes," exclaimed Jeannette.

"Then let us go to the refreshment-room."

"Come on. We have yet three-quarters of an hour before the train starts."

And loading his innumerable packages on to his broad shoulders, while Jeannette took up the household utensils and the bottles, the coal-dealer followed his new friend, who went toward the refreshment-room situated at the other end of the station.

"It begins well," said Piédouche to himself.

He had his plan, which consisted in making the couple miss the train, even if he had to get them thoroughly drunk to do so.

"What's your name, citizen, by your leave ?" asked the dealer.

"Balandin," replied Piédouche, with superb assurance. "I have been one of your trade. I sold coal in my time, but now I live on my means."

"I don't, but it will come as true as I'm called Jean Galoupiat, and my housekeeper Jeanne Contoleric."

"Real names of my old province. Only to hear them it makes me feel twenty years younger."

"You don't need that, citizen, since you don't stoop with age yet. Ain't that so, Jeannette?"

Jeannette did not reply to this except with a smile which extended from ear to ear. She evidently hardly agreed with the compliment which her husband addressed to the stranger. She liked strong men, and Piédouche, playing to nature the part of a petty merchant who had retired from business, could not please her. But he consoled himself all the easier for not having made a conquest of this black Venus, because he had at first feared being recognised by her for what he really was. On the day when the mute had rang at the cottage gate, the coal-woman was standing on her doorstep. She had plainly seen the chief of the investigation service and his two subordinates, and Piédouche had been one of them. It is true that he then wore a blouse and soft cap, and the change of costume sufficed to baffle the Auvergnats. Encouraged by this first success, the ex-detective had an idea. "I say, countryman," he exclaimed, "suppose instead of going to the refreshment-room where one has to stand up to drink, suppose we just go and refresh ourselves at that café over there on the Quai d'Austerlitz, opposite the gate."

"That would suit me to a ticket if we were sure not to miss the train," said Jean Galoupiat.

"The train won't leave without you, for, while drinking a drop, we shall see the clock of the station."

"I will have my eye on it," said Jeannette.

"Well then, come along," concluded Piédouche, going towards the yard where several cabs were standing. The one which had brought Tolbiac was no longer there, nor the equipage of the suspected lady either. The ex-detective did not fail to notice this circumstance while passing.

A moment later he was seated with the Auvergnat couple at a table outside a tavern which pretended to be a café. It was adorned in front with a row of evergreens in boxes, screened by an awning. Piédouche induced his guests to sit down, and placed himself in such a way as to hide the station from their view. He then proposed to them various kinds of refreshments, which were, however, all refused by the couple, till they decided to accept a small cup of black coffee well fortified with brandy.

They touched cups. Jean drank to the health of the citizen, who drank, in his turn, to the health of Madame Galoupiat, and they emptied their cups to the last drop. By the third round, they had become confidential. "Dash it all, citizen!" exclaimed the coal-dealer, "when we come back from seeing my Aunt Couvignon, you must come and sup with us."

"Willingly; but on conditions that I bring two bottles of wine of the right kind."

"That's settled, shake hands on it," said the Auvergnat, extending his broad paw.

Piédouche proffered his own, and then continued: "I wish it would be to-morrow, but you are going to stay a long time at your Aunt Couvignon's, perhaps?"

"That will depend; for, I must tell you, we are going down there to see about some property. My aunt has some land, and she wants to leave it to us—to me and my brothers—as a life estate. So some deeds must be passed, and then we sha'n't, perhaps, agree at first as to the division. However, it won't take us more than a month, I should say."

"In a month I shall have no more need of you, coal-dealer of my heart," thought Piédouche, "but I'll keep you from going. Waiter, a litre of brandy, and let it be old," he called out.

The litre was brought at once, and paid for by the citizen, whose generous ways quite dazzled the Auvergnats. "If you don't empty it here, you will finish it on the way," he said.

"That isn't the question, citizen," retorted Jean, giving a terrible blow with his fist on the table; "the question is for us to find each other again so that I can return your politeness. In what part of the city do you live?"

"Rue de Lappe, in the Faubourg Saint Antoine," replied Piédouche quickly, for he was never troubled about giving an imaginary address.

"I know the street, I have even some countrymen there, who are in the old iron trade. And, my faith, citizen, we are almost neighbours without looking like it. Nothing but the Seine and the Jardin des Plantes to cross. I've a shop near the Val-de-Grâce hospital, in the Rue de l'Arbalète."

"Hold on! why that is the street where they killed the woman who made all Paris run to the Morgue. Why, even I went there, I, who talk to you,"

"We, too, were there," said the Auvergnat, assuming a mysterious air. "Dash it all! you understand, she lived next door to us, the poor woman, and so we wanted to see if it were really her."

"And you recognised her?"

"Oh, quite so. When a fellow had seen her once, he couldn't forget her; and when she was alive we were in the habit of seeing her every day."

"It's true she was a beautiful creature," said Piédouche, earnestly.

"That depends on ideas," said the coal-woman; "a lean thing, with a face the colour of wax, and feet so small that they couldn't carry her."

"A doll, eh?" added Galoupiat; "but in Paris they like that."

"But then," asked the so-called citizen of the Rue de Lappe, "you must have been summoned as witnesses."

"I should think so," exclaimed Jeannette. "And it isn't mere talk, but if all the others had said as we did, the court wouldn't have condemned that cock."

"You mean Lecoq. What! so you think it wasn't him who struck the blow?"

"I know nothing about that, only I would put my hand in the fire if I ever saw him at the Englishwoman's. Jean and I did try to say that we didn't recognise him; but the judge cut our words short and sent us to sit down."

"And, to your mind, then, who was it who killed her?"

"My faith, you ask me more than I know."

"However," said the woman, lowering her voice, "there's some one walking about the streets of Paris who could tell you a great deal if she chose."

XIII.

PIÉDOUCHE was hardly able to conceal his surprise and delight on hearing this declaration, which led him to anticipate a more complete disclosure. Luck was decidedly returning to him, for if he had awkwardly let Tolbiac escape, he had fallen upon the only two beings who were able to throw any light upon the mystery of the Rue de l'Arbalète. And, by additional good

luck, he found that the coal-dealer and his wife were of opinion that justice had gone astray. But it was not enough to have them there at this café, it was also necessary to keep them in Paris, in view of obtaining useful information from them.

Time flew by, and in a few minutes the train which was to carry them to Auvergne would start.

Fortunately they could not see the clock at the station, and were drinking hard. All that was necessary, was to make them forget the hour, and Piédouche devoted all his energies to that object. He commenced by filling the glasses with the brandy served him—an ardent spirit which had certainly not come from Cognac, nor even from the Charente, and by swallowing his own allowance at one gulp, he set them an example which they needed no coaxing to follow. Ex-No. 29 could drink indefinitely when the service required it, and his head was proof against the most powerful alcohol. A man who is deficient in this power can never be a perfect detective.

In this respect, however, Jean Galoupiat was not his acquaintance's equal, and Jeannette in her turn, could not hold her own with her husband. They both of them became very talkative, and, besides, Piédouche knew how to make them talk. "What!" he exclaimed, "you think there is some one in Paris who knows the truth about the Lecoq affair. But come, my countrywoman, you must know that's impossible."

"Impossible!" repeated the woman, drily. "Well, then, I tell you it's as true as there's a God in heaven!"

"Come, Jeannette, be quiet," said her husband. "That business doesn't concern us."

"Why doesn't it concern us?" retorted Jeannette. "I saw what I saw—and not later than just now. Can I help having eyes?"

"What," said Piédouche, purposely assuming an air of incredulity, "you have seen the assassin—the real one?"

"It's all nonsense, countryman," replied the coal-dealer, quickly, for he did not care to let his wife go too far in this direction. "There's something, no doubt, but not as much as Jeannette says. The only point is this, the Englishwoman had a servant who went away on the same evening that her mistress was killed. It's funny, all the same, that she ran off like that, without saying where she was going, and may be she had reasons for making off."

"That's sure," said the ex-detective, "and if she were found—"

"It seems the authorities did look for her everywhere, but may be they didn't set to work in the right style, for they never laid their hands on her, and yet, she didn't leave Paris—that is, unless she has come back again."

"You have met her, then?"

"As you say, countryman."

"And where was that?"

"In the station here; we had just seen her pass when you came and spoke to us—and, my faith, you must have seen her too, without suspecting it."

"What is she like?"

"A tall blonde, bold looking, and dressed like a princess! She must have found a good place. At the time she served the Englishwoman, she wasn't so well off for clothes."

"Yes, I remember now, she paid for her ticket and then went to the train."

"That's it, countryman. But after all, it isn't much ; and Jeannette is rather venturesome when she pretends she knows the scoundrel who killed the Englishwoman and the merchant, and that it wasn't Lecoq. But, speaking of the train, we mustn't miss ours, and so I—"

"You've plenty of time. One more drink to your aunt's health."

"One more, but it must be the last."

They clinked glasses, and Jean Galoupiat had just tossed off a full bumper, when the station clock began to strike."

"Five o'clock !" exclaimed the coal-dealer, rising abruptly. "And the train starts at five minutes to. *Fouchtra !* we are in a nice fix."

"There's another this evening at midnight," muttered Jeannette, who was occupied in mixing herself some grog.

"And my aunt, who expects us to-morrow ?"

"You can send her a telegram," said Piédouche, delighted with the success of his manœuvre.

"There's no telegraph office at our place—and then, our aunt don't know how to read."

"Bah ! whether you go in three days or a fortnight, it will be all the same."

"You think that, do you ? And the division of the property, *fouchtra !* My cousins are quite capable of cutting it up into lots without me. And if I'm not there, they'll take the good land and leave me the bad."

"That would be a misfortune, it's true, but—"

"But what ? You are not going to tell me that it is lucky for us to have missed the train. If we had known, countryman, we shouldn't have clinked glasses with you. Ain't that so, Jeannette ?"

"It isn't the fault of the citizen," grumbled Jeannette, as she tasted her grog.

"Well, I certainly didn't do it expressly," exclaimed Piédouche ; "but, anyway, I don't want you to have a grudge against me, and I'll tell you of a way by which you might make more money than you will lose, by staying in Paris for three weeks longer."

"Make money ! that suits me, providing it's done honestly ; but put off the division of my aunt's property for three weeks ! oh, no, none of that, Lisette."

"Three weeks, a month, six weeks, that might depend ; but what would you say, countryman, if during the whole time you were needed you were paid forty francs a day ?"

"Forty francs ! Eight crowns of a hundred sous ?"

"Yes, and ten francs more for your wife."

"Ten crowns then ?"

"Yes, and paid cash every evening."

"That would suit me, but I doubt it. No one would pay so much if there wasn't something queer about it."

"And that's not all. There would be a reward."

"A reward ?"

"Of three thousand francs, which you would receive on the day you succeeded."

"Succeeded at what ?"

"Why, in finding the Englishwoman's servant, the woman you saw just now in the station."

"Well ! well ! well !" said the Auvergnat, changing his tone at each of the three exclamations, "you belong, then, to the police, do you ?"

"Ah, countryman, you haven't looked at me then. Have I the appearance of a detective?"

"My faith, no," said Jeannette, who felt full of indulgence towards Piédouche.

"The appearance has nothing to do with it," grumbled the coal-dealer.

"And where have you heard that the police pay hundreds and thousands for running after a woman?"

"That was never heard of," declared Jeannette.

"Possible," said the Auvergnat; "but when a person gives them it's queer—and we ought to know why. Are you the person in question?"

"I? oh, no! For instance, I have means of my own, but not enough to give you fifty francs a day. The man who would give them to you was at the Assize Court. You know very well that old fellow dressed like a Turk, with a white beard, who sat behind the judges?"

"With gold on his robe, and diamonds on all his fingers? oh, yes; I saw him. You were there too, then, at the trial?"

"Why, yes. I have a cousin who is an usher in the court, and he got me in—and put me beside the prince."

"He's a prince, that old man?"

"Yes, an Indian prince, and worth millions. However, he became quite friendly and chatted with me, for he isn't proud."

"Chatted! He speaks French, then?"

"Better than us."

Us was a politeness, for the coal-dealer expressed himself in a way of his own.

"And what did he say to you?"

"He told me that in his mind Lecoq wasn't guilty; that in his country they judged better than that; that they couldn't condemn a man on such evidence, which had no foundation; that the most important witnesses were wanting—the mute and the servant—in fact, a lot of nonsense. And the funniest thing is that he wanted to hire me to investigate the affair. Haven't they strange fancies, these foreigners?"

"That's what comes of being rich and having nothing to do. A man amuses himself with nothing."

"Finally, he offered me fifty francs a day and three thousand francs reward if I brought him either the servant or the deaf-mute, before Lecoq was executed."

"And if they brought him both?"

"The reward would be doubled. You may believe, countryman, that I didn't hope to win it. In the first place, I've no need of it; and then, I live a life as regular as the lines on music-paper. In the day-time, I fish with a line in the canal, and in the evening I play bezique at the Café du Commerce. I had even forgotten the prince and his proposal, but, my faith, since I have met you and you know the servant, I don't see why you shouldn't profit by the affair."

"My faith!" said the Auvergnat, "it's worth thinking about. Where does he stay, your prince?"

"The prince? He lives at the Grand Hotel," replied Piédouche.

"And where is that, the Grand Hotel?" asked Jean Galoupiat.

"On the main boulevards—not far from the Madeleine."

"And not near us, *fouchtra!* And, besides, if I went to this Grand Hotel, they wouldn't let me go in."

"Yes, they would, if the prince gave orders. He does what he likes

there, as he spends five hundred francs a day in the house. But if the matter annoyed you, you would have no need to go, for I could go in your place, see the prince, and tell him that I had his man. He would then charge me to come to terms with you."

"That's already done, since you know the terms. You said they were fifty francs a day, payable every evening?"

"Every evening, countryman."

"Where?"

"Wherever you like. At your house, or mine. Still, I should prefer it to be at your house, for, you understand, if you were seen coming up my stairs too often, it would set folks chattering. It's well known in the neighbourhood that I never light a fire at my lodgings, and as you are a coal-dealer—"

"While if you come to my house, you would be taken for a customer."

"Yes; but I would rather not show my nose in the Rue de l'Arbalète. The detectives must still prowl around there from time to time, for I have heard that the police still hope to catch an accomplice of Lecoq's, and I shouldn't like to compromise myself. Let's think of something else. Come, if you knew of a place near here where we could meet, an eating-house—"

"There's one I know somewhere about—on the Boulevard de l'Hôpital; it's called the Feu Eternel."

"Are there private rooms there?"

"Private rooms and public ones. And cookery to make your mouth water, with wine from our part—Montferrand—which reminds one of home."

"Then that's just what we want, countryman. And if you'll come and take supper every evening at the Feu Eternel, at half-past seven o'clock, you can tell me what you have done during the day and I will give you your ten pieces of a hundred sous."

"And you will treat to supper?"

"That may be taken for granted, but on one condition: that is, that Madame Jeannette is present."

"You are very polite, citizen, and it isn't to be refused," exclaimed the coal-woman. She certainly had a weakness for Piédouche.

"Then it's understood, and I shall expect you to-morrow evening."

"Understood! understood! you go too fast, countryman," said the coal-dealer, who, like a prudent mountaineer, did not like to engage himself thoughtlessly. "I must know, first of all, what I have to do. Find the Englishwoman's servant; that's soon said, but it isn't easy. We have just seen her, but we shall, perhaps, never see her again."

"If you wait for her to pass along the Rue de l'Arbalète, it's certain you won't; for she can't be in a hurry to go there again. But if you walk about in the stylish quarters you'll have a chance of putting your hand on her."

"Walk about! And my business?"

"Your business? Why, you would have had to leave it, to go to your aunt's."

"And you know very well that my cousin, Pierre, will take care of the shop," said Jeannette, who had already secretly aspired to lead the life of a fine lady.

"In the first place," continued Piédouche, "you might succeed even to day. The Englishwoman has just gone into the country, but she won't remain there long, for she had no baggage with her. If you waited

for the arrival of the evening trains, I have an idea that you would miss her."

"And if she was there, must I seize hold of her?"

"No no," said Piédouche, quickly. "You would get yourself into a bad scrape by that, and the prince would be no further advanced. You must say nothing, but follow her to see where she goes."

"Follow her? Not possible, citizen. She has a carriage of her own and horses with better legs than mine."

"Is that the bother? Why a man takes a cab and gives ten francs to the driver for him to run his nag lame, if necessary, rather than let the equipage out of sight."

"Ten francs! ten francs! You talk easily, you do."

"Come, countryman, you certainly haven't confidence in me, and you want a pledge on our bargain. Here it is," said Piédouche, taking two louis and two five-franc pieces from his purse. "I'm not rich, but I can advance you the coin for one day. The prince will return it to me to-morrow."

The Auvergnat looked at the gold and silver with covetous eyes, but he still hesitated about taking it. It was Jeannette who finally pocketed the coins, exclaiming, "You surely won't offend the gentleman by refusing them."

"And your husband will never repent of having accepted them, my dear ma'am," exclaimed Piédouche. "Think of it! Three thousand francs reward!"

"We'll buy the field next to Aunt Couvignon's estate," continued Jeannette, who at this moment played the part of Eve tempting her husband.

"And you would have to sell a good many faggots before you could earn as much," continued the so-called citizen of the Rue de Lappe.

The coal-dealer, now fairly overpowered, gave a formidable blow on the table with his fist and exclaimed: "So much the worse. It's a go."

"That's the way to talk," said Piédouche. "You are now on the road to becoming a rich man, and, if you'll believe me, you'll start on the business at once. In the first place, if I were you, I should go back to the shop to get rid of those packages. You would attract far too much attention with your baskets, mattresses, and bottles, and you have some time before you. If the Englishwoman returns to Paris this evening, she will only come by one of the last trains. You will certainly be at the station before she is."

"And if she doesn't come back this evening," said the coal-dealer, "we must wait for her to-morrow."

"No, it wouldn't be worth while, for then she can return by carriage or by another railroad. There is one which corresponds with the Orleans line. To-morrow you must stay at home very quietly till three o'clock. Then Madame Galoupiat will make herself beautiful; you will put on your Sunday clothes, and you will both go, arm-in-arm, and stroll in the Champs-Élysées in the first place, and afterwards in the Bois de Boulogne. You must look at all the carriages which pass, and the women who are in them. The Englishwoman looks to me as though she had launched out since she left her mistress. She must make the tour of the lake every day."

"She's quite capable of it, the creature!" grumbled virtuous Jeannette.

"Yes, but it will cost her dear," said the coal-dealer. "If I see her, I shall run after her till I know where she lodges, even if I should have to run six leagues on foot."

"And if you don't see her to-morrow, you will begin again the next day, and so on."

"For fifty francs each time?"

"That's understood. And every evening we will dine together at the *Feu Eternel*."

"Very well, *fouchtra!* citizen; only rascals back out of an agreement, and I'll show you that I am not a good-for-nothing. Now then, Jeannette, let's go and carry our things home, tell the *cousin* that we are not going away, and shut up the shop. This evening we'll come back and stand guard at the entrance to the station, to-morrow we'll go and review the ladies, and after that we shall be ready for grub and merry-making."

Jeannette was already on her feet, and Piédouche called the waiter to pay the score. "I will see you again, countryman," he said, while the Auvergnat squeezed both his hands till they cracked. "The prince will be delighted to hear that I have found some one who will *ferret* out the servant for him. He's a queer card, all the same, this millionaire. But, after all, that's his business, and he's rich enough to pay for his fancies. Only see that he has something for his money—that's to say, don't let the Englishwoman run away to England after you've met her. If she's faulty, and sees that you follow her, she will suspect what you are after, for she knows you, doesn't she?"

"Not very well. She hardly ever talked when she was in service in the Rue de l'Arbalète, and, in fact, she didn't speak to us more than ten times in all. And then, when we put on our best clothes, Jeanne and me, that changes us. So citizen, rest easy, she won't recollect us, and the proof is that just now, in the waiting-room, she paid no attention to us, and yet we weren't rigged out."

"You are right, countryman. Till to-morrow," said Piédouche, quickly, for he suddenly became anxious to separate himself from the Auvergnat couple, having espied a person whom he very much wished to talk with.

XIV.

JEAN GALOUPIAT and his wife were also glad to bring the meeting to a close. They took leave of the citizen, who had just unfolded a golden future to them, and started off with light hearts albeit they were heavily laden with their household effects.

Piédouche let them go, paid the score while they were getting away, and transferred his attention to a man who was crossing the yard of the station towards the quay. Although he had seen this man but once, and then for not more than half-an-hour, he had recognised him at the first glance. It was the very individual who had asked him and Pigache for information concerning Tolbiac, on the evening when the two detectives were awaiting the mute's exit from Mazas. It was indeed the switchman of the Orleans railway line, Pierre Cambremer.

Piédouche perfectly remembered the conversation this Cambremer had held with him on that evening, and the singular story he had related, a story about some gold dropped by M. Tolbiac, and picked up by the switchman's little daughter, who, in doing so, had barely escaped being crushed by a locomotive. And he also remembered that the switchman had made some mention of an inheritance which, according to Tolbiac, ought to fall to his child.

Piédouche had not failed to recount all this to Father Lecoq on the very day he entered his service. At first the old detective had not paid much attention to the incident. Although he already mistrusted Tolbiac, he did not as yet suspect him of having played an active part in the mute's escape, an escape which so greatly resembled an abduction. But later on, during his stay in England, between the arrest and condemnation of his son, his ideas had become modified, and he had evidently gathered certain information respecting the O'Sullivan inheritance, for after his return to France his measures all tended to discovering the major's heirs. In the long and frequent interviews he had with Piédouche, the adventure of Pierre Cambremer's daughter had more than once been the subject of conversation, and it was certainly a part of M. Lecoq's plan to clear up this obscure point in Tolbiac's manoeuvres.

Piédouche had been expressly charged by his patron to renew his acquaintance with the switchman, and employ all his tact in obtaining more precise information concerning the interview with Tolbiac. If the ex-detective had so far not executed Father Lecoq's orders it was that he had been engaged in more pressing business. Besides, but little time had elapsed since the installation of the false nabob and his attendant at the Grand Hotel, and it had been necessary for them to organise their complicated existence, prepare to play a number of rôles, and secure themselves against all surprises. Thus, the campaign had but just opened, and Piédouche had made his first sortie on this very day. It had not by any means resulted in a failure, for if he had let Tolbiac escape, he was sure to find him again, and besides, chance had brought him a most valuable discovery. It was one of M. Lecoq's greatest desires to find Mary Fassitt's servant, and Piédouche could now almost hope that this woman would be discovered, for he was confident that the Auvergnat couple would meet her one day or another. And, in proof of the axiom which says that one piece of good luck never comes alone, Cambremer turned up at the right time to enable Piédouche to approach him in a natural way.

The switchman was not in his working costume, but had the appearance of a man who is going to take a stroll, and who, consequently, has time to chat. Moreover, he held by the hand a little girl, who was no doubt the heroine of the drama enacted three months previously; and the presence of this little child furnished Piédouche with an excellent opportunity for bringing the conversation to the subject which interested him.

He was about to profit by it, when he remembered that he was disguised as a well-to-do middle aged man. This disguise, which had just been very useful to him in captivating the coal-dealers, was inconvenient for dealing with the switchman. Cambremer had seen Piédouche dressed as a porter of the Lyons railway company, and it was more than probable he would fail to recognise a comrade in a tidy, elderly citizen. The difficulty consisted in explaining this transformation by somewhat plausible reasons. Fortunately, ex-No. 29 was never short of expedients, and changes at sight did not trouble him. He straightened himself up, removed with one wipe of his handkerchief the wrinkles with which he had lined his face, pulled off his wig and removed his false whiskers; he then stiffened the muscles of his legs and assumed that motion of the shoulders and arms common to men who are accustomed to carry heavy loads. This was done before he was fairly clear of the tavern where he had treated his friends the Galoupiats. They were already out of sight, and did not even witness this instantaneous transfiguration from afar.

The Quai d'Austerlitz was now deserted, the traffic having ceased around the station after the departure of the train, which Aunt Couvignon's nephew had lost. Cambremer was chatting with his little daughter, and as he was obliged to stoop to talk to her, he did not notice the approach of Piédouche, who manœuvred in such a way as to meet him just as he passed the gate. Piédouche succeeded in running against him, and this shock was naturally followed by a colloquy. "Be a little careful, please," said the switchman.

"Hallo! why it's you, comrade," exclaimed Piédouche.

"Comrade!" repeated Cambremer, "I don't know you."

"That's to say, that you've no memory; but I—I have one, and I remember very well that you treated me once at the wine-shop opposite the Lyons station."

"In fact, it seems to me now that I recollect; but it was a long time ago."

"It was last winter, in the month of January. I left the service in February."

"But—when we met you were a porter?"

"I had been one for ten years; and, my faith, I had had enough of it. And so, when I inherited some coin from a cousin I had never seen, I made haste to leave the company; and now I live on my means."

"You are very fortunate."

"Hum! that depends; there are moments when I get tired of doing nothing. When a man has neither wife nor children the time seems long. And so, I am delighted when I have a chance to offer a treat to a friend, as I now offer you."

"Thanks; I don't drink between my meals," said Cambremer, coldly.

"Ah, comrade, it is not good-natured of you to refuse me like that; you invited me three months ago to come and see you at the station. I came expressly for that purpose, and I was just going to ask news of you from the first employé I met. Since I have found you, you won't do me the affront to leave me in the lurch just now. In the first place, I owe you a treat. You treated me over there, and to-day it is my turn."

"If I was not with my little one, I shouldn't say no to you; but you understand that she prefers to run about the Jardin des Plantes rather than enter a wine-shop."

"Very well, I'll go with you there, we can refresh ourselves at the café—there is one at the entrance to the garden—and the child can eat some cakes while we take a drink. She is as pretty as a picture, your little one. And, I say!—her inheritance; is there no more talk about that?"

"What inheritance?"

"The inheritance which some fellow pretended ought to come to your daughter on the day when she was so nearly run over while picking up the gold coins on the line."

"I told you about that, then?" exclaimed Cambremer, somewhat surprised.

"Why, yes; on the Boulevard Mazas. We had just left you, and chatted with the citizen in question, who bothered me for information about a train. When he had gone, you ran after me to ask me if I knew him."

"Yes; I remember now. And you told me that you had never seen him before. Ah! he's a strange individual. Do you know I went to his house ten times to return his money, and was never able to see him. So I finished by leaving the louis with the concierge."

"And the inheritance? I suppose that was only a yarn?"

"I think so. Nevertheless, yesterday I took a fancy to read the papers which my poor wife, who is dead, received from her mother, and I learned a good many things I did not know. It seems that my little girl, Marthe, descends from a great Irish family."

XV.

"BAH!" exclaimed Piédouche, quite surprised by this revelation.

"Well, yes," said Cambremer; "the papers seem to me to be in form; and from what I read, my wife, whom I lost four years ago, had an Irish grandee for her great-grandfather."

"And you didn't suspect it?"

"No; nor she either. Well, it's understood. She was an orphan when I married her; she worked in a factory, and her name indeed was Pauline Bernier."

"The fact is that Bernier isn't an Irish name."

"And her mother, who didn't leave her a sou, was a Guichard."

"Guichard is no more Irish than Bernier."

"That's what I said to myself, but I found Madame Guichard's certificate of birth, and her maiden name was Elizabeth O'Sullivan."

"O'Sullivan," repeated Piédouche, who could not believe his ears.

"Yes, and Elizabeth's father was a land-owner in the vicinity of Dublin. Is it not strange, all the same, that my little Marthe has gentle blood in her veins? Her mother worked for a living, her grandmother also: I gain my living by working, and I come from a family of labourers. But all this doesn't interest you, and besides, the little one very much wants to go and play. I'll see you again, comrade."

"Ah, no," said Piédouche, "we can't part like that. I'm going with you—especially as I should like to chat with you a little about that inheritance. Would you believe it comes like March in Lent, for I know a man who makes a business of hunting up inheritances. It was he who told me one fine morning that I was the relative in the sixth degree of a cattle-dealer who had died, without children and without a will, leaving sixty thousand francs behind him. I didn't even know that he existed, this Norman cousin, and if I now have an income it's to Father Vinet I owe it."

"This M. Tolbiac de Tinchebray, perhaps, makes a business of inheritances also?"

"The man who lost the gold? My faith, it wouldn't astonish me; only, I've an idea that it would be better for you to apply to Father Vinet. He's honest, and doesn't take ten per cent. But to chat about that, we should be much better in the shade; and you can say what you please, comrade, I won't let you go till we have touched glasses together," concluded Piédouche, taking Cambremer by the arm.

The switchman allowed himself to be led, and they walked up the quay to the Pont d'Austerlitz, where there is an esplanade planted with stunted trees, and decorated with a waterless fountain. Little Marthe jumped for joy, but she did not let go of her father's hand to run, like most children of her age would have done. She looked up into his face, and her big blue eyes expressed feelings seldom met with in little girls ten years old. A passionate, thoughtful tenderness could be read in them, the tenderness of a child raised in the school of misfortune, accustomed to the hardships of a

life of labour and poverty ; understanding that later on, she must struggle to gain a place in this world, and appreciating the devotion of her courageous father who toiled to give her bread. It was not love that she felt for Cambremer, but positive adoration. Her gaiety disappeared when he was away from her ; and when he brought her home from school, she nestled close to him, holding herself erect as though she was proud to be the daughter of this good workman, whom all the people of the neighbourhood met with a friendly : " Good-evening."

And she no longer cared to go and run under the chestnut trees in the Jardin des Plantes, since she noticed that her father wanted to chat with the stranger who had joined them. Besides, Piédouche did not displease her. He had an open face and smiled good-naturedly at the little one, thinking of his own " young 'uns " at the same time. On the esplanade he met a cake-seller, and filled Martha's pockets with ginger-bread and barley-sugar. But the little one had not allowed herself to be thus treated until consulting her father with a glance.

There was a café near at hand, a cleaner establishment, and frequented by a better class of people than the tavern to which the detective had conducted the coal-dealer and his wife. There were several tables placed outside, and the customers were not numerous. " That's our affair," exclaimed Piédouche. " We will drink a glass in the open air, and the little one will have room to play."

Cambremer did not need much begging to assent, for he in no wise suspected the comrade who had fallen to him from the clouds, and there is not much ceremony between workmen about accepting or standing treat. Besides, Piédouche's talk had impressed Pierre, and he began to tell himself that it would be wrong to neglect a chance, small as it might be, of assuring his daughter's future. Not that he was covetous. No ; since his boyhood he had earned his living with his arms, and he firmly believed that a man who is willing to work need never lack bread. He had that faith of the workman, which rich folks regard as improvidence, but which is only courageous resignation. However, he also knew that accidents often occur on railroads ; he knew that a locomotive might some day pass over his body, and that if he were killed on the switchman's battle-field, Marthe would be left alone in the world. He recalled the sufferings his own wife had endured in her girlhood when she was a poor apprentice in a cotton-mill, working ten hours a day and earning barely sufficient to prevent her from starving, and exposed, moreover, to every temptation and danger. And he huddled as he thought that this same fate awaited Marthe, and that his daughter might not have the good fortune to meet a brave fellow ready to unite two lives of misery and strive to blend them into one of happiness. Then his interview with Tolbiac recurred to him. He had not at first attached much importance to it, but the discovery he had made in his wife's papers which he had never before looked at, this unexpected discovery of the filiation of Pauline Bernier, made M. Tolbiac's vague intimations more definite. And, behold, all at once a man appears to him and spreads out a new horizon, talking of his obtaining a large inheritance as though it was something most natural and easy. He could not refuse to listen to him, for he was a father, and his daughter's interests were in question. " You really think, then, that this M. Vinet, who has put you in possession of the property of a distant relative, would know how to clear up my affair ?" he said, after emptying his glass.

" I'm sure of it," replied ex-No. 20, " and if you like. I'll take you

to see him whenever you choose. He lives in the Rue de la Roquette close to the place where they guillotine murderers, and he receives every evening from eight to ten."

"My faith, I should be glad to see him. I'm not over-confident about the inheritance, and I'm even inclined to believe that this Tolbiac was ridiculing me. But after all, I haven't the right to be indifferent about the matter—perhaps it's an opportunity to enrich my little one."

"And then, it will cost you nothing. At Father Vinet's you only pay when you inherit. What day shall we appoint to go and see him?"

"I have my evening free to-day, but I have promised to dine with one of my friends, an engineer, who has a daughter of the same age as mine—the children will enjoy themselves together so I wouldn't deprive them of it—but on Thursday next week I shall be free again."

"Thursday, that will suit me. I'll wait for you at eight o'clock precisely on the Place du Château d'Eau, and I'll take you to Vinet's."

"All right. I'll bring some of my papers. You shall see them. It's curious. They form a big package. Certificates of birth and death, contracts of marriage, and even a kind of picture which represents a tree with all the branches and the names of the O'Sullivan family. Pauline's mother had fortunately preserved all this, but my poor wife had never opened the package, and it is a miracle that she did not use the papers to light our fire."

"Well, you'll see how Father Vinet will decipher your papers. The names, excepting your mother-in-law's, must be English; but he knows English—he knows everything."

"There are English names—and French names too. Thus, I noticed that of a M. Lecomte, who also descended from an O'Sullivan—he is a cousin of my little Marthe, that gentleman."

"Lecomte!" repeated Piédouche, and he became thoughtful.

"Do you know him, this M. Lecomte?" asked Cambremer, who had noticed the change which had come over his companion's face.

"I know ten people of the name," replied Piédouche; "one who is a grocer in the Rue du Temple, and another who is a cabinet-maker in the Faubourg St. Antoine."

"The one whose mother's name was O'Sullivan, like Marthe's great-grandmother, is said in the papers to have been a clerk to a stock-broker at the time he married."

"Then he perhaps has made a fortune; but he may also very well be dead. You don't remember at what date he was married?"

"I think I read that it was in 1855."

"That is rather more than twenty years ago," said Piédouche talking to himself. "M. Louis' sweetheart is about nineteen, and her name is Thérèse Lecomte. It would be funny if—but no. There are almost as many Lecomtes in France as there are Durands and Martins; nevertheless, Mademoiselle Thérèse is the daughter of a banker—and from a broker's clerk to banker is but a step. As for myself, I can't go to Boulogne again; it would make me feel too queer, for I am the cause of all the trouble. The patron wouldn't go there either for it would derange his plans. But if this Cambremer went to see the Lecomtes and talked to them about this inheritance, he might perhaps discover that they also descend from an O'Sullivan, and that will throw a little light on the affair which occupies Tolbiac. Cambremer won't meet Father Vinet, that is to say Father Lecoq, before next Thursday. If between now and their interview he could meet

the ladies at Boulogne, he might perhaps have some news for us." And he continued aloud: "Dear me. I've just thought, I also know a Lecomte who was formerly in a bank or a broker's office, it's pretty much the same thing. I worked for him at one time. Before I was employed by the Lyons railroad, I was a locksmith by profession, and it was I who fixed all the locks in a villa he was building at Boulogne, on the bank of the Seine opposite Saint Cloud. He has died since that, but his wife and daughter still live there. You ought to go and see them."

"What to say?"

"To ask them if the late M. Lecomte's mother was not named O'Sullivan."

"It would be the strangest thing in the world if it were so, and I should never dare to go and see them without being sure of it. Besides, what pretext could I have for presenting myself? A banker's widow doesn't receive a mere workman like me. Her servants would turn me out of doors."

"Bah! You would only have to say that you brought some information about an inheritance. They would receive you, don't worry. Although people may be rich, they always like to inherit—women especially. And this Madame Lecomte cannot be made different from other people."

"That may be so, but even if she consented to talk with me, I shouldn't be much farther advanced."

"Who knows? She would perhaps tell you things you are not aware of and which it would be very useful for you to know, if only to relate them to Father Vinet, who might make use of them in his search. For instance, if she told you who the head of the O'Sullivan family was, that would already be a great point gained. Listen to me and go, the sooner the better. The villa is at Boulogne-sur-Seine, on the Boulevard du Quatre-Septembre, quite at the end of it; it is a large house built of stone and brick, and standing in the middle of a large garden. Anybody will point it out to you."

"Yes, but that's a good way off, and I haven't time to spare."

"Bah! you can easily get leave for three hours one of these evenings, and the boat will take you there for six sous, from the Pont d'Austerlitz to the Pont de Saint Cloud."

"Very well. I don't say no, although these steps hardly amuse me; but then, as Marthe's interests are in question—"

"But where is she? I don't see her any more," added Cambremer, rising suddenly.

"She was playing there just now," replied Piédouche; "she can't have gone very far. And see, there she is, looking at a man with a barrel organ, who is making a monkey dance."

The child was not more than ten steps from the café at the most, and her father had only to call her to bring her running back to him. "Amuse yourself," said Cambremer to her, "but don't go far away."

"Then I may go back and listen to the music?" asked the little one.

And, as her father smiled, she sprang up and threw her arms round his neck and gave him two hearty kisses on his cheeks, then she ran off again to take her place in the circle formed around the strolling musician.

"How fortunate you are to have such a pretty child," said Piédouche. "One can see that she has Irish blood in her veins," he added; "she is fair, with large blue eyes, and as white as a lily."

"She resembles her mother," murmured Cambremer, driving back a tear.

"When she grows up she will be a beauty, and when she is rich, fine toilets will fittingly become her," continued Piédouche, smiling.

"All I ask of God is that she may be happy."

"If you mean to say that riches don't make one happy, I answer that they contribute wonderfully towards it. So I hope you won't fail to be at the rendezvous next Thursday."

"I've promised you, I shall go."

"And you won't forget to bring your papers."

"I shall forget nothing."

"Then everything will go straight, you may be sure of that. Ah, you were lucky to find those papers—"

"I found them at the bottom of an old trunk which had belonged to my wife's mother. It was the visit from that man Tolbiac which made me think of looking for them. And, speaking about that man, I still ask myself why he came to the switch in search of me, and what business he follows."

"I think he works in the same line as Father Vinet, but not from a good motive. You know very well that in Paris there are people who seek for unclaimed inheritances, to hand them over to the rightful heirs, minus a commission. But there are also others who run after them to steal them."

"And how do they manage that? To receive an inheritance a man must have a right to it."

"That's so, but suppose that there are several who have a right to it, and that one of these finds the means to do away with the others."

"By killing them?"

"My faith, people have been killed for less than that, and in your place, I should keep a close watch over the little one."

"I have already come near losing her. It is a miracle that she was not crushed by the locomotive on the day that Tolbiac called. Who knows if he did not purposely scatter his gold on the track!"

"Ah! I hadn't thought of that," said Piédouche, who determined himself to profit by the idea suggested by Cambremer. "But, I say, I don't see the child any more again. While we have been chatting the organ-grinder has gone along with his monkey. She probably followed him."

The father was already on his feet, and walked quickly towards the gate of the Jardin des Plantes. People were passing constantly in and out, groups of children were playing on the esplanade, and a line of vehicles was following the quay. Cambremer looked everywhere for his daughter, but could not see her. He darted here and there like a madman, calling her by name.

Piédouche, who had remained behind to pay the score, soon joined him, and was not a little moved when he perceived that the little one had disappeared. Fortunately, their anxiety was soon at an end. Marthe came running all at once from the Boulevard de l'Hôpital, stopped to look around her, and, as soon as she saw Cambremer, gave but one spring to reach the esplanade.

Her father took her in his arms exclaiming: "Oh! how you frightened me."

The little girl covered him with kisses, and exclaimed, clapping her hands: "I knew very well that you were still at the café. She lied, that bad woman who wanted to take me away, telling me that you were waiting for me at home."

"A woman!" repeated Cambremer, in a stifled voice.

"Yes, father, an old woman. She held me by the arm, but I bit her, so she was obliged to let go of me, and I ran away."

"Ah, the wretch!" exclaimed the switchman; "she shall pay for this"

Piédouche now laid his hand upon his shoulder, and said : " Comrade, I warned you to watch over your daughter. What has just happened proves—at least such is my idea—that somebody wants to do her harm because she's an heiress. Don't amuse yourself running after a hag you wouldn't catch, but hurry and come and see Father Vinet. Till Thursday, that is my last word." And without giving Marthe's father time to reply, he started off towards the bridge.

He had just seen the Auvergnat couple approaching in the distance. They were coming to mount guard before the entrance to the railway station, and he did not care they should meet him in company with Cambremer. Besides, he had said all he wished to say to the switchman, and he was anxious to return to the Grand Hotel, to inform the nabob that he had not wasted his time.

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